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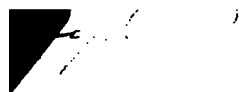


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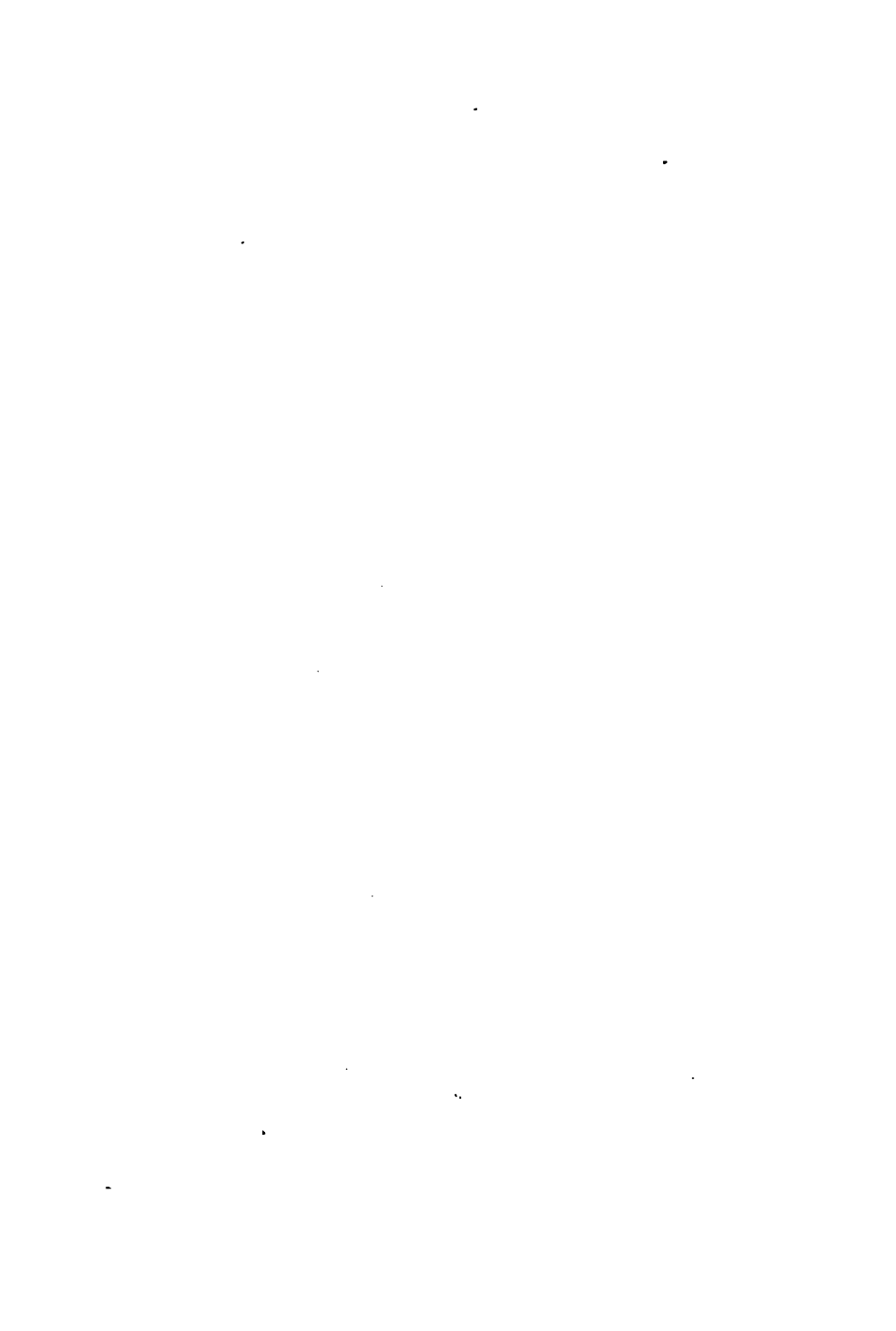
A. G. Vermilye, D.D.



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Stray Reveries



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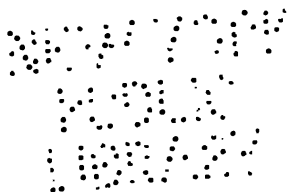




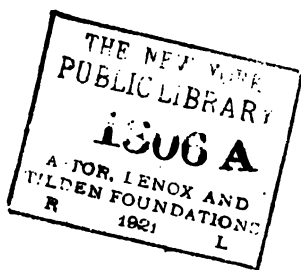
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Stray Reveries

By
A. G. Vermilye, D.D.



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TO MY WIFE,
WHO, DURING FIFTY YEARS OF MARRIED LIFE,
AMID DUTIES, CARES, ACTIVE USEFULNESS, AND SOMETIMES
SORROWS,
HAS MAINTAINED AN UNFAILINGLY BRIGHT AND GENIAL
CHRISTIAN SPIRIT
HELPPFUL TO MANY WITHOUT AS WELL AS WITHIN THE HOME,
THIS LITTLE MEMORATIVE VOLUME IS DEDICATED
BY HER LOVING HUSBAND

ASHBEL G. VERMILYE

November Twenty-fourth
1847-1897

Fifty long years have passed away
Like clouds from a summer sky,
And the ripened sheaves of these useful lives
In the autumn sunlight lie.

As they think of the years all vanished and gone,
And the varied scenes review,
It appears but the span of one short day,
Now bright in the evening's dew.

Through sunshine and through shadows deep
The fleeting years have passed;
But, thank the God who gives the light,
The sun shines clear at last.

From early dawn of married joys,
From quiet glow of noon,
These lives now rest 'neath the golden rays
Of a sunny afternoon.

The sunset hour is yet to come:
Oh, may it tarry long;
Then only change a glorious eve
Into a lasting morn!

E. B. V.

1



Greeting

WO have attained the anniversary of fifty years of married life together, is usually deemed an event worthy of a celebration. Few, comparatively, are spared to this golden age, and of the friends of youth few are apt to remain. It is as a souvenir for the old and the new friends, as a harvest sheaf plucked in the golden twilight, that these "Stray Reveries," the product of vagrant fancies taking form and color in the golden

Greeting

light of the study fire, are now bound together in a printed volume. Originally prepared for a literary circle in Englewood, they have since lain upon the shelf unused, except some fragments quite recently read at another club in New York City. On an occasion so rare as a golden wedding, the wife of fifty years may, of course, select whatever suits her taste, as a memento. As such a memento upon such an occasion this volume is now presented.

ENGLEWOOD, N. J.,
November 24, 1897.

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Andirons

THERE needs prefatory explanation to a subject like andirons. Andirons, handirons, endirons, or brand-irons, whichever the spelling, the meaning and use are the same—those movable irons upon which we arrange the wood from which to get the warm and cheery fire. The evolution of the andiron must have been synchronous with civilization itself. We go back to the savage, squatted in or before his tent: he has no andirons; a

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few sticks propped against one another or crossed upon the ashes, with the random smoke floating rudderless about his head and eyes—these were his sources of mingled comfort and discomfort. In the Highlands of Scotland even so late as 1800—so says Hugh Miller, in his “Schools and Schoolmasters”—the sitting-room of the family had its fire in the middle of the floor, a domestic bonfire, around which sat the inmates in a wide circle, the women on one side, the men on the other. Existence assumes at once a new and brighter dress with the incoming of chimneys, at least chimneys that draw well; while beneath, upon the hearth, stand the ready andirons, with, perhaps, an inside pair of shorter “creepers,” as they were called, on which to build, with needful gangways for the passage of air, the household fire. In old England, and formerly in New England, the absence of andirons meant abject pov-

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erty. The mind's eye at once sees the process. Intemperance, the worst of sheriffs, the meanest, greediest, and most heartless of landlords, has seized and sold one thing after another to satisfy its demands. Only the andirons remain, a trifle yet to be had for so much brass or copper or iron. They, too, go; "the coal that was left" turns black and cold in the ashes; and of the family's joys and comfort at the ingleside nothing remains but ashes. On the other hand, have we not a fine old picture of what once was, in the familiar word "dogs" as a substitute for "andirons"? We see some earlier Sir Walter sitting by the fire, his favorite dogs around him. Imagination dreams and pictures things as usual amid the blaze, till there are the dogs propped on fore legs and with haunches crooked in the ashes! To complete the resemblance, a dog's head at the top soon becomes the favorite ornamental device.

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But now, one step further. The purpose of an andiron is simply contributive—to hold in place the wood that produces the fire. If the polish of its brass throws a side-light, as used to be thought, upon the housekeeper's neatness, that is merely incidental, a part of that circumstantial evidence, that *tout ensemble*, which always decides the question for or against a woman, along with the absence of dust and cobwebs, and other things many, which the observing eye takes in. But what is fire, and how do the andirons contribute? Fire, then, or rather combustion, is merely a chemical change, a new combination of the elements of the wood with the oxygen of the air. The chemical change in a tree during decay, when its surface turns black, is precisely the same; only the process is one of years, so slow that we get from it no heat, no fire. More than this, our own bodies illustrate the same thing; this same

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chemical change is going on, and with every motion, with every respiration, something is burned up, though we see it not. Life, the reconstructive principle, the ever-busy repairer of our dwelling, at length wanes in force, yields to the destroying oxygen; decay is complete, the fire is out, there remains nothing but dust and ashes. Nothing? Even chemistry has something to say in favor of resurrection. Collect those ashes remaining upon the hearth, and the smoke that has ascended the chimney, weigh them (it has been done), and together they exactly equal the wood and the oxygen that were consumed. When physical energy disappears in one form, it exactly reappears in some other form. That is the law; a cycle of changes, but nothing lost. Decay, death itself, are but changes; and nature's analogies are all one way, in favor of elemental resurrection. Paul does but put and hold resurrection of the body firmly

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among the analogies, strange to the world as the idea was, and to many still is. "Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die." But science gives us one more idea. In one respect only does the law of the conversion of energy fail. Absolute tests of science demonstrate, it is said, that in brain-action no particle of its substantial energy is ever converted into mental energy. It is all and always there, the same. Were it otherwise, were mind and thought simply physical converts of brain-action, they could be measured, as we measure by weight the wood, the oxygen, the ashes, the smoke. But it is not so. Materialism is scientifically untrue, because here is something that does not obey the laws of matter. Decay, death, as physical changes, do not affect the mind. It has laws of its own, an existence of its own, separate from the brain and the body, as the tenant from the house.

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And so from our andirons, spanned by their wooden bridge, we have passed easily into the region of thought; from the kindling fire, and the ashes and decay, out into the pure upper air of the spiritual.

Let us now, however, come down to nearer things and our present living. The mind, like hunting-dogs, will not track till it gets the scent. These old "dogs" of the fireplace have given us the scent of something under and around the wood. To be sure, their only bark is on the wood; but let us follow where they "give tongue," all the more rejoicing if it be a good, blazing tongue of fire. First, then, oh for the return of the age of brass andirons! We know, of course, it cannot be:

"For nature brings not back the mastodon,
Nor we those times."

They have gone with the grand old woods, the hickory, the oak, and the birch.

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Perhaps the andirons themselves have gone—gone with the fender and tongs and warming-pan, the treasured heirlooms of the family; gone for a song, sold for a sixpence; gone (who knows?) with one's best suit of clothes, to swell the spoils of some unctuous, all-grasping traveling peddler: such ignorance—with such brass—do some women display! All the more room for a sigh, though life otherwise be full of spring and swallowtails; for that suit and those andirons and that honest peddler will not return over the road they went; time is too precious, and “no mistakes corrected.” Nevertheless, what has gone out of the house, or what ornamental device come in,—vase or bric-à-brac,—more precious than those andirons? Symbols of how much! The ruby lip and the roses of the cheek are beautiful; else why do women paint? But these are the colors of oxygen—admiral not of the blue, but of the red,

Andirons

which, if it be the great destroyer, is also by its presence the assurance of health. And whence the oxygen in most modern rooms? The hot stove burns it out, and the supply is not equal to the demand; or the furnace below-stairs sends us air mixed with dust, or dry and singed of its qualities, like a cat of its fur by contact with hot iron. Then, after dark, comes (shall we say?) Mr. Fish-tail Gas-burner to spend an evening with the girls, that is, Rubylip and Rose. Now we do not often hear Fish-tail called objectionable. Not brilliant, admitted; but popular and fashionable—all the burners are—and we know in what different senses fashion “covers a multitude of sins.” Fish-tail owes his position in society entirely to his connections—underground mostly, it is true; but then—it is quite common—if you are nothing yourself, hunt up your connections, get your gas from underground sources. Many society lights do this; noth-

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ing of themselves, they owe everything to some defunct forebear—though perhaps their tailors and tradesmen might dispute this. This Mr. Fish-tail Gas-burner, however, is really a social nuisance, one of the worst and most intolerable upstarts and dudes of the day. He comes into a parlor already lacking in air,—no chimney, no andirons,—where a sparrow would die in an hour, and we only do not; air that the girls need to make them beautiful and vivacious and sweet-tempered;—comes and, without a word to say for himself, guzzles oxygen enough, this single Mr. Fish-tail, to meet the demands of five full-grown people! To spend an evening! Why, he would stay till morning, all alone, or till some one came and turned him out! But meantime the girls—wondering why, perhaps, or blaming themselves—have become sleepy, indulged in many a furtive yawn, and then confessed a headache and gone to bed.

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Is it not wonderful, since we live by oxygen, how some modern mortals live at all? There is a little rotifer that lives in a drop of water, all told, eighteen days. If the water dries up it dies. Nevertheless, by being put in another drop, one has been known to revive after twenty-seven years. We are not like that; we must have our oxygen steady, if not, as the English say of their brandy, "neat." But then, by getting accustomed to it, one can live on amazingly little! A toad has just come out alive from a rock after twenty thousand years' imprisonment.

Our "dogs," however, have started one more thought, one based upon and dependent upon the andirons. It has been said by linguists that the French have no synonym for our word "comfort." And in the sense of feeling at home, the sense of perfect ease and enjoyment, how can they, who have no such homes! "We may

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find pleasure," says Crabbe, "in every country ; but comfort is to be found in our own country only." When Othello returns once more to Desdemona, after his " wars are done," and " the Turks are drown'd," he says :

" I fear,
My soul hath her content so absolute,
That not another comfort like to this
Succeeds in unknown fate."

He is at home, at ease, at rest again, where mind and nerves and heart concur in this welcome and slippered undress. Of all this the Frenchman knows not. How should he? The footlights and salon and outside company suit him better. Even of himself what Saint-Simon says of the regent Orléans would be largely true, that " he was so accustomed to live out of himself that he could not endure to reënter." When a Frenchman was asked why he did not marry a certain lady, he replied: " Where, then, could I spend my even-

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ings?" Of home feeling, the domestic circle, unless times are changed, the Frenchman knows little. Again, how should he? As one has well said: "Hearts and hearths go together." There must be a common center; and the domestic circle is one drawn, as from a hub, around the andirons, the fender, and the fire. But in France, or Paris, the wood is not there, or too high. A brazier of charcoal, at just so much a day, subserves the three great ends of a Frenchman's vital economics: to heat his room, to cook his meal, and then, if needful, to end him with a neat, economical, and agreeable suicide.

This drawing together upon a common center is the very beginning (is it not?) of family life. This sense of comfort, of ease, around the andirons; the affinity, the genial warmth, the glow, the mingling of voices, the interchange of thought, that made common which before was individ-

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ual,—what can better accomplish the great objects of a family? This educates; this it is that makes winter the pleasant summer of the heart. The emperor Charles V. was a very cold man; therefore, even in Spain, at the Alcazar, at the sun-toasted Alhambra, and afterward at his convent at Yuste, his first requirement was a fireplace, with andirons, no doubt, of silver or gold. Well, yes; warm him up (if you can), and the cold convent of monks and friars, with something natural, genial—by eminence, the family fire; something that peradventure may penetrate, strike in, and reach his heart; nothing better, if perchance he has a heart—if it be not, in reality, boring on speculation for an artesian well. The glow of a good fire, laid up scientifically on the andirons, so as to bring out its best points of heat and flame, with brothers and sisters, the different ages, gathered round, this, as we just now said,

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educates, welds the family union, strengthens the roots of large affections, and by its comfort brings content with home. Hobbes of Malmesbury instituted what was called the "selfish" philosophy. Physical sensations, his theory declared, were the bases of all knowledge. These were, so to speak, his andirons, upon which he built his next thought, that everything resulting from these physical sensations must itself be physical. Good and evil, for instance, are only terms in use for something physical—personal pleasure or pain. There is nothing else—no such thing as charity or pity or the affections; and the highest motive in life can only be to get pleasure and avoid pain. How different from the philosophy of Grotius, which began with the social affections; which, because of these social affections, made man, naturally, by nature, a member of society; which, from this, advanced to the thought of reciprocal rights and duties;

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to law, as the protector of both individuals and society ; and to international law, as, even in war, the world-wide protector of both. A benevolent theory. But, then, Hobbes was a bachelor, Grotius was not. After fifteen Hobbes never lived at home ; at six his head was crammed with Latin and Greek, instead of warming his heart with hearthstone influences ; he lived and died the plebeian literary attaché of a nobleman's house ; ate his dinner alone, and then, behind barred doors and amid the smoke of a dozen pipes, thought and wrote his "selfish" philosophy. Such things tell and account for much speculative misanthropy and much unwholesome thought of great minds.

Ralph Waldo Emerson has expressed the thought that we should "sit like gods on separate peaks." Again, a "selfish" philosophy. He himself liked to sit spread out on all peaks, and speak or thunder or

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nod to suit himself, while his Israel listened and gaped and received their mental and moral law from his lips. We have, however, seen something in these later days and in families of this sitting "like gods on separate peaks," and its results. Madam, for instance, decides to give a swell party. Her husband is not exactly consulted, he is told; utters a little ineffectual heat-lightning, and retires, till the time comes, to his peak. Of course at the proper time he is there or thereabouts, in full—he dressed up, and she dressed down. His hands are behind him—a man in the image of a ninepin, whose bulge is in the middle. At each fresh greeting—"Glad to make your acquaintance"—he bows solemnly, looks, rises fore and aft, on heel and on toe, and looks again; a mute appeal of helplessness, which seems to say: "Please worship, for this evening, at that peak, the diamond one; I merely pay the bills." That, indeed,

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is his place in the house, when off his own peak—in Wall Street! You see, they have no andirons, no common center, only registers or steam-heaters. How soon and how early—all round, throughout the group of sons and daughters—the tender and the mutual congeals! The outside world suits them better. It seems unnatural, it is reducing the human relation very low, but so it is; and the worst of it is, it can hardly be called ingratitude; it is merely the family training. The hen casts off her brood as soon as their pin-feathers are well under way; the human brood takes itself off without much regard to pin-feathers. The sons are where? what influence has home, even the mother? The dog often receives more recognition and affection from casual visitors at the house than she ever does from her last year's half-grown puppy. And so it goes on; the selfish and greedy sea each year eating its way farther into

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the green meadows of the heart, whereon strong domestic affections should have been nurtured. Mrs. Fanny Kemble relates that a certain curate whom she knew was called in to see a dying man. His wife was sitting at his side. Grieving? Oh, a full "schooner" of grief, with the froth overflowing the lip! She began at once to tell the curate what a good wife she had been, how well she had discharged her duties. Just then, however, a feeble voice from the bed interrupted with the words: "Pretty well, pretty well!" Evidently he was a man without sentiment or affection. It was an unfeeling remark, inappropriate to the occasion, aggravating, a Parthian arrow, and it broke the unwinding thread of her grief. Sternly, therefore, she turned upon him and said: "You hold your tongue, Thomas, and mind your dying!" She meant, of course, that the curate was there to console her; and that Thomas,

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meanwhile, should mind his own business. And after such a rebuke it is to be supposed that he did; that she went on with her story, and he with his dying. They together had never cultivated the andirons and the chimney-corner and the warm, humanizing effects of its fire.

But let us now pass, for mention, to the influence of andirons on literature. We have alluded to Hobbes; and even genius is not independent of its surroundings. Early ill health, confinement to the house, and watching the tea-kettle over the fire, led James Watt to invent the steam-engine. The inventive faculty was there, of course; but his circumstances decided the form in which it showed itself. Chinese philosophy asserts the seat of the understanding to be the stomach. Let us do them no injustice in this. A keen-witted and observant people, they noticed, as a universal fact, how hunger, dyspepsia, and other such

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evils affected the temper, spirits, mind; how a good dinner kindled the mind; how witty their after-dinner speakers invariably became; what a bead was on their style, and what a fine flavor in the speech; noticed subtle variations produced by, say, an underdone or overdone dog or cat; and such a people could not miss the inference, which is indeed inevitable, and amply sustained by English and American political and social history, that the stomach is the seat of the understanding. Hence, in their salutations, instead of saying, "Howdy?" "How are you?" or even, like the Hollanders, "Have you had a good dinner?" they make it at once philosophical, comprehensive, and kindly, by saying, "How's your stomach?" In fact, the influence of such things—the mental accessories and surroundings—upon literature is not to be underestimated. Take the poet, for instance; how much his thoughts and poetry

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depend on what he sees and feels! Take Burns, his "Cottar's Saturday Night," a classic in poetry; what is it but the simplest picture in words of a hearth-scene in a poor man's cottage? But how beautiful—something one can see and feel:

"The cheerfu' supper done, wi' serious face
They round the ingle form a circle wide;
The sire turns o'er with patriarchal grace
The big ha' Bible, ance his father's pride:
His bonnet reverently is laid aside,
His lyart haffets wearing thin and bare;
Those strains that once did sweet in Zion glide,
He wales a portion with judicious care;
And, 'Let us worship God,' he says with solemn air."

Then "all lights are quenched"; only the glimmer of the peat fire in the middle remains; but the glow of piety and faith lights the old man and his thoughts upward.

Neither Burns nor Irving could have resisted it, I think, had they witnessed another recorded Scotch fireside scene. A

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blacksmith's son, in the vale of Nith, had learned to sing bass, of which his father had never heard. The old man, being choleric and quick-tempered, imagined he was setting up an opposition tune at family prayers, and determined to give him a parental lesson. So, putting a new stick on the fire, he turned to the One Hundred and Nineteenth Psalm, the longest in the book, and began to sing; till at sunrise, as the mother afterward said, the son's voice was reduced to that condition that "the scraich of a magpie was music till't"!

Yes; it is natural and philosophical that literature should be influenced by the andirons. When a man comes home "bone-tired," "hunger-poisoned" in mind and heart, after "the weariness, the fever, and the fret" of business,—what Matthew Arnold calls "that strange disease of modern life,"—we know how it is with him if

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he can get for the evening by a good fire ; and how much good it does all round—that is, provided he does not bring home his wife's rival, the newspaper. In the case of literature, it is the difference to the mind between a hot, dry air and good oxygen, with the comfort and brightness that boost and enliven the sluggish thought. I fancy that must be "dry humor," sometimes very dry, that is the product of stove air. As it illustrates, I may mention that one of my congregation was once Miss Hannah F. Gould, the poetess, who, for a time, divided the honors with Mrs. Sigourney. She lived by herself in a three-story brick house. Power of conversation, which is prose, she had none ; her words came in a shambling, slow, and hesitating way ; but she would sit down by the andirons and a good fire, with knitting in hand, and make bright and well-worded poetry. Then her wit would dance in flashes, like the fire

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itself—twinkling little epigrams and the like. You know

“ An epigram is like a bee—a thing
Of little size, with honey and a sting”;

and here is one of hers, as a specimen, on the Hon. Caleb Cushing :

“ Lie aside, all ye dead,
For in the next bed
Reposes the body of Cushing;
He has crowded his way
Through the world, as they say,
And even though dead will be pushing.”

It was, indeed, a strange fulfilment of this, that, when he was buried, the sod of two neighboring graves had to be cut away, and his body to be pushed down into his tomb. If twenty centuries looked down from the pyramids upon the army of Napoleon, perhaps Hannah was there, repeating her epigram upon the top of her own tombstone some twenty feet away!

But, alas! the andirons, though thus

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healthily helpful to literature on the intellectual side, cannot better bad character. That is beyond the power of oxygen. "There is no easy-chair," it has been said, "for a discontented man." Vanity and its kindred vices have "a certain salaman-drine quality," which makes them impervious to all influences of the hearth. Never did Voltaire, for instance, appear worse than in the light of an incident which concerned his fire. Having mentioned one day at Tournay, his then residence, that he needed fire-wood, his friend De Brosse, senior president of the Parliament, and a man of high repute, offered to speak to a dealer whom he knew, on the subject. The wood came, fourteen loads, and with it the bill. Voltaire, however, first burned the wood—which was a shrewd performance—and then refused to pay, saying that De Brosse was the debtor, and the wood a present from him. When De

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Brosses heard of it and replied that "he had never heard of such a thing as a present of fourteen loads of wood, except to a convent of Capuchins," Voltaire immediately shifted the issue, saying: "The question, sir, is no longer about *four* loads of fire-wood." As he himself says: "Lying, when useful, is a virtue of the first class—a vice only when it is mischievous," i.e., to the liar. But from that time he began to hunt and hound the president, De Brosses. The Derbyshire peasant in England has eight different terms for a pigsty; and Voltaire was quite as prolific in the invention of names for the worthy president, such as "stupid," "snuffling," "rascal," etc. At eighty years of age he was still pursuing and venomous, and kept De Brosses from a seat in the French Academy. All because of fourteen loads of fire-wood! I take it that Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde are but a variation or expansion of Mr. Scad-

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der in "Martin Chuzzlewit," one side of whose face was good, the other villainous in the extreme. But Voltaire's character, as a man, had no such opposites; looked at fairly in the face, it was perfectly symmetrical, and—villainous in the extreme. There was no burnt cork of the actor about his malice and meanness, nothing put on for effect; there, at least, he was genuine. When the wolf was learning to read, the fable says, the letters all spelled "lamb," nor could he get even as far as "mutton." So with Voltaire. If he improved at all on the wolf, it was in being able to interchange malice and meanness. In bitter, pursuing enmity, as with De Brosses, a very blizzard of a man! He carried "a jewel in his head," but also, like the toad, "ugly and venomous," the rest of him was distended with vanity and foul humors. He always had a New Testament on his desk, but none of it in himself. Put him together, head

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and heart, and you have those unpleasant contrasts of the menagerie—a majestic elephant capable of uprooting trees, and a villainous collection and convolution of monkeys and snakes.

I have prepared the way, perhaps, for another highly beneficent use of andirons. I have referred to uses physical, social, and mental ; and now ? “ Can you emit sparks ? ” said a cat to a duck. The question was full of scorn and contempt. The mice all looked after, her housework done, puss sits in the chimney-corner by the fire, full of comfort and repose. You come in, sit down, speak pleasantly to her, and stroke her fur. Perhaps it pleases her ; or, after a little, perhaps she gives you an ill-tempered retort and a touch of the claw. You think her very capricious, variable, uncertain, and not at all good-natured, in view of your efforts to make yourself agreeable. Oh, no ; she is a first-class electrical ma-

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chine, ranking next to the frog, on whose unwilling legs the thunder-storm first practised galvanism. You have excited her latent electricity, and it is pricking her like fine needles. Nevertheless, when not too pointed, puss dearly loves sparking in front of a good fire, and purrs her approval; in fact, deems it a choicer privilege of race than to have been the inventor of evening serenades, or, as Addison points out, the originator of all stringed instrumental music. Hence her question to the duck: "Can you emit sparks?"

It may not be known, however, how much electricity we all carry; that a timid woman who fears a thunder-storm has all the elements of that storm in her own hair; and that, properly insulated and under proper conditions, by simply having her hair combed she can set fire to gas or gun-powder, blow up her husband, and evolve sparks with freedom. This considered,

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viz., that woman is a natural battery, it was a graceful compliment to her place in nature that her fingers, and not a man's, should send the first telegram and touch off the rocks at Hell Gate; and I see good philosophy in the fact that French ladies, those cunning feminines, once held open-door audiences during the operation of hair-dressing. It appears (does it not?) that sparking has a foundation in nature. It was genius, however, and probably country genius, that first applied the term as one of sentiment.

But my business is with the andirons. What a blessing, indeed, and an inspirer, that old-fashioned fire; when two people, cozily installed before it, are feeling their way on to the future—like grubs, to be sure, all ignorant of that future, but spinning their cocoons and preparing for it; and when, as they talk and chat of this and that, as yet but sentimental, the burning

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brand breaks, bursts into a blaze, and the sparks fly up the chimney or over the fender. Then, if there is any corn in the popper, it, or he, pops; and puss, with lifted ears, purrs her approval. So pleasant, indeed, is that old-fashioned fire now blazing, that neither cares to leave, though the time-honored clock in the corner strikes slowly and seriously, to call attention, and a voice from the top stair comes reprov-ingly down: "Sallie, it is eleven o'clock!" No encouragement here, you will see, to neuralgic affections, that come and go with a spasm; or for pleuritic attachments, that are confined to the lining of the chest. Nowadays, indeed, the question is apt to be, how much he or she is worth—a chest affection. The answer lights the match, a mere parlor match, or proves it lacking the needful phosphorus. I knew one once, a refined maiden, who, after engagement, was one day asked "how much her father

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would probably leave her." He was a handsome man, a brilliant writer, a society favorite, but inwardly mean and selfish. That question killed. It was a revelation, a flash of light. She died. The wine was poisoned, and it shattered the delicate glass; but he—went on to the next. In parlor, in bedroom, at party and ball, gas-light and furnace, without other vent for their wickedness, are busy with people. The chandelier burns blue, and the register in the corner, like a Shaksperian Iago, with much pretense of friendship and genial warmth, dispenses its volatile poison. The imagination contracts the hue of its surroundings; takes on a mercantile air, or becomes utterly unwholesome. The andirons and family fire are the original and always complaisant helpers of pure sentiment and emotions. But Rubylip and Rose, only a season or two out, are now dreaming of being countesses, perhaps

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duchesses; or the one will marry for money, and the other—run away with the coachman!

It must be said, however, that even andirons must have fair play. Miss Hannah Oldbug and Farmer Crane, so says a New England chronicle, were seated on one settle, but for some as yet inscrutable reason quite seven feet apart, the length of the settle, unsocial as milestones. The fire had got low, and Mr. Crane was not, as usual, poking it up; and even the old butter-boat lamp below the mantelpiece seemed to partake of the dullness. The real reason was with Miss Hannah. She had never been to Boston, but somehow this evening had used such high-flown and, to Mr. Crane, mystical language that he, poor man, could not understand her—had talked of the “indissoluble union,” “sympathy of hearts,” “paying one’s de-

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voirs," "soliciting one's hand," etc. The fact was, she had been reading "Sir Charles Grandison," a novel of that day, and, says the chronicle, "the work did oft beguile her of her tears." When, therefore, she said to him, "Alas! Mr. Crane, I fear I shall never find in you a Grandison," it was too much for the honest farmer. He thought she meant a *grandson*, and said, "No; nor a *grandfather* either, since I'm only ten years your senior, Miss Hannah." This went on till all the benevolent work of the andirons during many evenings was undone, and he said, "Look ye, Miss Hannah; if so be you are off, I'm off"; and he took his hat and went. It only remains to add, first, of Mr. Crane's affections, that, like some country buckwheat-cakes left from Monday's breakfast, rather leaden to begin with, they had been warmed over for Tuesday. The fire did

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it; some other could do it again. But Miss Hannah—

“ To the grave she went
Without a husband; later on content
. . . to eat her mess,
In tidy cares and single blessedness”;

and therein, as in an egg-shell easily cracked, lies the moral.

If you will bear with me for one more thought: the andirons in general are gone, the wood-smokes are gone, and with them the chimney-swallows. Formerly they returned in April, first one, then more, and for years together, to the same old nest. Then, earliest up in the morning, with the sparrow and pigeon next, all day long and into the evening, with open mouth and indefatigable wing, they were gathering insects. But coal-gas, which spoils mortar and chimney, is also too pungent for them. And so, one by one, we lose our birds—driven away from town and city, chimney and barn and lawn, by our modern habits.

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Who ever hears a bobolink? Yet that must be a song worth hearing that could make a boy drop his stone. When asked why he had not thrown, one such urchin said, "Couldn't, 'cos he sung so!" It is true the robin remains, and does his part to repair the emptiness: now on the ground, running quickly, stopping and cocking his head to listen, and then with a plunge and a jerk, lo! the worm—"linked sweetness, long drawn out"; or now, again, he is on the tree, singing cheerily, no matter what the weather, to the patient mate in the maple as well as the mopers in the house. How suggestive, how full of thought, in such a connection, those two lines of Lowell:

"He sings to the wide world, and she to her nest.
In the nice ear of nature which song is the best?"

How suggestive, yes, if we add Whittier's lines:

"Then, smiling to myself, I said:
How like are men and birds!"

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Some such likeness, indeed, some affinity of nature, the old English peasants must have seen when, with pleasant familiarity, they named the redbreast Robin, and the hedge-sparrow Isaac, and the house-sparrow Philip.

Well, besides the robins there is philip. I do not object to the sparrows. Undoubtedly in the cities they have become bold and rapacious and all that; but it is only from "going into society"—the force of example, doing as their betters do. "People that live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones" at the little sparrows. It is true they are everywhere; but so are the reporters, and in the same business. In a word, there are many more obnoxious people in New York than sparrows, on the street and elsewhere. I will find you one hundred dirty Italians before one sparrow; they never get drunk; politely rise and let you pass on the street; if noisy, so are the

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street-boys and stock exchange; if seemingly rapacious, so are the Jews, and others; yet, all told, a brave, plucky, honest, and industrious little folk. In winter, when other birds are away, their bustle and twitter around the nest are refreshing. They constitute two millions of our resident population,—or did before the blizzard,—and yet we treat them as if they were Chinese; for both, it is said, “must go.”

Nevertheless, every bird has its exact place in nature. We ourselves, perhaps, have not missed the chimney-swallows. We have not noticed how the music of the air was dying out in presence of noise and the mercantile spirit and treeless lawns and coal-gas and the like. Nevertheless again, the insects have known the change. There has been a disturbance in nature's variety and fullness of plan. With its sixty stops and five thousand pipes and its vox

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humana, the great organ at Haarlem, in Holland, can certainly spare one or more, can it not? The organist thinks not; it would at some point break the plan. Merely a swallow! But I do not know anything more touching, more suggestive, as a lesson from bird life than what is called the "wren's requiem." What is it lying on the ground? Only the body of a wren, one of the smallest of birds! But hanging over it from the window-sill above, in semicircular festoons, are twenty or thirty wrens. Clinging thus together with foot and wing in the shape of festoons, they remain for two or three minutes, twittering softly, and then break and fly away. That is the "wren's requiem." Merely a wren's, one of the least of lives; but it is a far-reaching lesson.

And so, returning to our swallows, evidently there is a place for them. We are feeling the effects of their absence. Evi-

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dently, what with the worms and the increasing insects, our robins, even with the help of the sparrows, are being overworked; the public service is suffering, and their "department of the interior" requires reinforcement. Indeed, if a Frenchman's idea be correct, we have need of yet greater birds. In Cooper's "Spy" a Mr. Wharton's place is called the "Locusts." But Miss Cooper discovered that a French translator, who knew nothing of the locust-tree, had translated the word, from the dictionary, "Les Sauterelles" (grasshoppers). Farther on, however, he came across the stunning fact that a visitor had tied his horse to a locust, i.e., a grasshopper; whereupon he proceeded to inform his French readers that in America these insects grew to an enormous size, and that in this case one had evidently been used as a hitching-post, whether by a hook through his nose or a chain about his leg,

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he did not specify. It may be he had in mind our Western grasshoppers—those from Manitoba, that now roam the prairies in place of the defunct buffalo; or our political ones—our grain and other speculators; in either case, they are hardly the sort to hitch a horse to, with any hope of finding him again. But what of the birds? and where are they, to meet the growth of insect life? Very soon shall we have any at all? The trees and forests are disappearing, for wastefulness of our wooded domain is our reckless American way. Fortunately, we are inventive; and a hint, an accidental English one, may, perhaps, solve the difficult question. You may not know that to tar and feather a person was a Boston notion, traceable to 1770. It has occasionally been practised since, but with no very satisfactory results. The person merely sheds his coat as soon as he can, and is himself again, feeling, perhaps, a

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trifle mean or mad ; and no effort has been made, at least in America, to improve upon the original process. In England, however, it once became the basis of a surprising result and a valuable discovery. An actor named O'Brian—Lord Holland's son-in-law, and husband of Lady Susan Strangeways, who afterward acted with him in Philadelphia—was once, while drunk, smeared all over, not with tar, but with currant jelly, and then rolled in a feather-bed. On waking he caught the full-length portrait of himself in the pier-glass, and exclaimed in amazement, "A bird, I declare!" Whereupon he took to flight, not stopping even to find out of what species, though had he so done he would have seen he was a goose. Now see the possibilities of this discovery. How better solve the tramp question? What a life they now lead! Said a sympathetic woman to one, as she made him up a bou-

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quet of flowers, "Poor man! your life must have been full of trials." "Yes, mum," he replied; "but the worst of it is, I allus gets convicted." See what a change! By Darwin's theory he would be a migratory bird—would in winter go South. What a saving in poorhouses and lockups and judges! If he came back, whether in season or out of season, if he became too numerous, or perched on the clothes-lines, he could be shot. Indeed, what should hinder Congress or the legislature from putting him on the free list, outside of protection or game laws? What a popular item in a tariff for protection to home industries it would be! The one great difficulty in the way of this desirable reform (and yet American ingenuity might overcome it by a substitute) would seem to be the expenditure and waste, and possibly the enhanced price, of so much currant

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jelly. Certainly the tramp himself would be neater and better dressed, might prove himself a feathered songster, or, having long fed on cold potatoes, might become the needed antidote to the potato-bug, or yet the slayer of those gigantic grasshoppers.

But my "lament" for the "andirons" is done. I myself, fortunately, have a pair—andirons and fender—of the old brass pattern; but they are, in the main, obsolescent. Yet, as a memory of youth, how pleasant to recall, if one can, the bright and genial fire, the weird shapes that formed themselves amid the blaze, when as yet the chimney-swallow was no stranger, but twittered and bustled in the top upon its nest of twigs cemented with cherry-tree gum, and where, in its absence, neither cat nor other intruder could molest its young! How people enjoyed that fire!

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I can yet see an old theological professor of New Brunswick, a man of splendid form, with his shining knee- and shoe-buckles on, smoking his long Dutch pipe in one corner of the hearth, as did his *wrouw* in the other, each homishly and pleasantly, each with the day's work done, and each, it may be, with thoughts the sweeter and better for that cheerful chimney fire. How grandly must have looked Sir Walter, and how grandly worked his fancy, as, with eye upon the bright and leaping flame, he traced the outlines of "Ivanhoe," recalled as Irving had told it to him the story of the beautiful American Jewess, Miss Rebecca Gratz, of Pennsylvania, and made of it his noblest female creation, Rebecca of York! So played and leaped and blazed, like the flame and firelight before him, the genius and fancy of Shakspeare. We have none such now, only Howells, James, and the like. Remember that in Longfellow's

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study one prominent feature was fireplace and andirons.

But, though a long one, my stick is burned—is nothing, it may be, but ashes; lucky if I have not also used up the andirons.



Hobbies

IT is well known that a good dinner means appropriate variety—the meats and salads, for instance, being seasonably interchanged with what is lighter and less hearty, that the digestion be not overstrained. Thus an olive or an almond may in due place be of service and add zest to the more ambitious part of the meal. The old Romans understood this, if some more modern dinner-givers do not, since we are

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told that they considered flowers as a very essential article in their preparations, not as ornament merely, but for their sanative and medicinal qualities; and when Nero, that refined voluptuary, supped in his golden house, it was his custom to have a mingled shower of flowers and odorous essences fall upon him, that his various senses and appetites might be refreshed and invigorated.

It has occurred to me to take for this evening—as answering, perhaps, the purpose of a bit of celery and salt, or an olive or almond, amid the statelier dishes that have followed one another during the winter—the subject of hobbies. If it be not up in substance or flavor to the delightful roast pig, which was Charles Lamb's favorite and hobby, and on which he wrote one of "Elia's" best papers, saying, "The strong man may fatten on him, and the weakling refuseth not his mild juices"; it

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may, perhaps, take the place of the plain pewter pot of porter with which he lubricated the way for more pig.

The first thing in a subject is, or should be, a proper definition—what they call in foreign statesmanship, where the question is about disputed boundaries, “delimitation.” A most important matter is a definition. Many an angry controversy or duel would have been nipped in the bud or strangled in infancy had the contestants only asked one another, to begin with, “What do you mean by that? do you mean anything offensive?” It is not uncommon, after berating a man in good, solid English,—with more or less profanity, perhaps, as the plums in the pudding,—to find that he neither is, holds, nor has done what was supposed. It is like the two men, presumably Irish, who, casually meeting one another in the street, rushed up, seized and shook hands violently, called

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each other by name, and then found it was neither of them.

A good definition, however, it is well known, is a difficult thing to give. Therefore it is well to begin negatively—to say what a thing is not and so “delimitate” the extraneous and doubtful. Had the gentlemen aforesaid, for instance, approached each other cautiously,—saying to themselves, “That is not Jones, though it looks like him”; “That is not Smith,”—they would not have looked so foolish when they found it was neither of them—that, in fact, both of them were outsiders. How much domestic infelicity might have been avoided had the husband, in describing some other lady to his wife, been cautious enough to say first, negatively, “She is not”—or “not exactly”—“a beauty”! Is it not known, in domestic circles, that after that he might have called her with impunity the best creature known to zoölogy?

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So I begin negatively; and not to mix things that sound alike, and to disturb not even a rose-leaf in the tender verbiage of young married life, I would say, if any here use the term, that "hubby dear" is not the same as hobby. In its true inwardness it may be a cousin once or twice removed. But it is not a hobby to make much of one's husband. Besides, etymology settles it: "husband," "hubby," "hub"—the nave of the wheel ("nave," unhappily, being often spelled with a *k*), the center upon which the wheel revolves, just as the planets, big and little, revolve around the sun, compelled by his great attractions; "houseband," "hobby," "hob"—a boor, a clown, a frightful apparition. Evidently not the same, although "hubby" may be the earlier form of speech, speech in the tender state; "hobby" the form a little later on, when tenderness has subsided into cousinship somewhat removed; unfor-

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unately, even relatives sometimes call one another hard names.

"Hobby," then, to speak positively, was at first, in its origin, merely the name of a Scotch or Irish horse which had a peculiar or eccentric motion,—in reality a pacer,—but which made it a favorite for riding. Then the name passed over to express any favorite, eccentric, or peculiar idea or pursuit. Hence the phrase "riding a hobby." It is sometimes used as synonymous with "a man of one idea," but unjustly. Timothy Titcomb, in his "Lessons in Life," has a disparaging chapter on "the man of one idea"; whom he regards as "essentially insane"—a man who only holds a pint, and cannot, therefore, take the quart of medicine which would be necessary to cure him. Titcomb applies his fling to temperance and other reformers. But that "one idea" may be a good, sensible, or very grand one,—one which, when worked out, may

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be a fine invention or discovery or something of lasting good to men; while the gist of the hobby lies in its eccentricity. I confess it is not pleasant to think that so many of one's fellow-men who are pursuing and absorbed in a vocation, inventing something, perhaps—the man that “minds his own business”—that these are essentially insane.

We call a man a hobbyist, then, who has some one favorite idea or notion which he trots out and rides continually, but where the idea itself or his manner of riding has in it an element of eccentricity. The famous Dr. Chalmers was once telling how queer his horse was—that it had thrown him six times within a given distance. The truth, however, was that the doctor's riding was so remarkably eccentric that the horse, which was a good one, could not keep him on its back; the doctor would fall off! We are very apt thus

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to blame others for our own faults. But, as with the doctor, the hobby the man is riding may be a good one, and the chief or only absurdity in himself. For what is eccentric or differs from other people's ideas and ways is very apt to be considered by them absurd. And hence, while the rider of a bicycle is admired for the length and size and muscle of his legs, the rider of the hobby is flouted and laughed at as one who shows his ears—in many cases justly, no doubt. But, to finish this part, it must be said that there are hobbyists and hobbyists. While some are entertaining and instructive,—like Coleridge, for instance, when he mounted a favorite idea, and who would hold his auditors entranced during a monologue of two or three hours; although Carlyle does say that “to sit like a passive bucket and be pumped into for three mortal hours can in no case be pleasing to any creature,”—nevertheless, there

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is a descending scale till we touch bottom in the crank. The meaning of this word may not be quite certain, but in sea phrase, when a ship lacks ballast, steers badly, is badly balanced, and might easily go over, she is said to be crank. So of a man who is habitually off the medium line of common sense, whether from lack of ballast or brains, we say that he is "cranky in his notions," or a crank; not exactly crazy, but near enough to be called so. The twist in his construction is as plain as a corkscrew; his notions are corkscrews, about which he will talk to you by the hour, invite you to take stock and make your fortune, only somehow they draw no corks.

Now with this element in it of eccentricity, peculiarity, if not downright absurdity, which characterizes the riding of hobbies, it is strange how at times they dilate from some small beginning, like the eye under treatment of belladonna, till they become

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great public crazes. Fashions are like the tides; they come and go and have their high- and low-water mark; but hobbies are singularities, like that for bric-à-brac and old furniture. Rare pictures, rare books, as specimens of human genius, may be intrinsically valuable and be thus preserved, or, like Mrs. Morgan's hobby for orchids, may scatter superfluous riches. But what shall be thought or said of one public and historic craze, in itself absolutely absurd, but which took place in staid old Holland? The explanation of the latter fact would probably be that when quiet people do break out they go to extremes—get more drunk, often, than ten professional toppers. I can only give the outlines of this wonderful affair, but it began in Haarlem in the fifteenth century, and the subject was tulips. Nothing else was talked of; other industries were neglected; prices became fabulous; a rare bulb was a fortune, or a girl's dowry

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when that dowry was computed by her own weight in coin. They sold bulbs in the stock-market as they did bonds,—sold them “short,” in quantities they never had and never could have,—and paid differences, until at last the market broke, with the usual episode of riches and ruin. Even in this century, in England, a tulip has been worth more than an oak. We are likewise indebted to Holland for another historic absurdity, where fools seem at the time to have been as plentiful as windmills. Mynheer von Klaes, of Rotterdam, was during life a great smoker. He also had a fine hquse, in which it was his hobby to collect all the styles of pipes that had ever been used, from Adam’s time downward, arranging them with great taste and artistic effect, just as the bones of St. Ursula and the eleven thousand virgins are arranged in Cologne, in stars, crowns, and various devices, in and around the ceilings and walls.

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When, in his ninety-eighth year, he came to die,—being by that time, it may be supposed, sufficiently well smoked,—he dictated his will in brief as followz: all the smokers in the country were to be invited to the funeral; they were each and all to be provided out of his estate with ten pounds of tobacco and two pipes, and during the funeral ceremonies were to smoke uninterruptedly. His coffin was to be lined with the wood of his old cigar-boxes, and at his side were to be laid his favorite pipe and a box of matches,—“Because,” as he says, “no one knows what may happen”; and in passing the vault every smoker was to cast upon the coffin the ashes of his pipe. Surely this was “running a hobby into the ground”; but, strange to say, every item of the will was rigorously carried out, and during the funeral Rotterdam was draped, if not exactly in mourning, at least in smoke, and the smoke and the

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ashes of the pipes were like unto Herculaneum and Pompeii.

We may, in passing, contrast with this another eccentricity. Guyot, a Frenchman, lived so miserly as even to be hooted and pelted in the streets ; but at his death this brief will was found : “ Having observed from my infancy that the poor of Marseilles are ill supplied with water, which can only be procured at a great price, I have cheerfully labored all my life to procure for them this great blessing, and I direct that the whole of my property shall be expended in building an aqueduct for their use.” This seems very noble. Nevertheless, the question might be, whether he was not a miser by nature, who took pleasure in hoarding, and who was thus riding two hobbies at once, the one a steady-going, long-distance beast, the other not at all to be commended and decidedly eccentric.

But from hobbies of this marvelous kind

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let us now come down to others, of which the specimens are here and there in life, some pleasant, some unpleasant, some innocent, some hurtful, but all tarred with the same stick—eccentricity. We laugh sometimes at these, and are sometimes annoyed; but what would life be without its eccentrics, each riding his little hobby? nature, if its trees were all straight and sound, without individuality or excrescences to mark them? It is said that Boston circles have had under discussion the question, "The mission of the crank." I do not know what particular crank Boston may have had in view, perhaps some more than usually cranky Bostonian. But evidently the mission of the crank in life is to fill out nature's variety, and especially to keep things lively; to be the discordant note which by contrast appreciates the beauty of harmony; to be as the hand-organ in summer, with its weird

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and animating music when the street is dull, as the fly upon the sleepy man's nose, or the mosquito whose repeatedly presented bill keeps him awake, if it does annoy. Everything has its mission in this world, down to the parasite under the mosquito's own wing, where it keeps up a perpetual itching, and, on the mosquito's part, no means of scratching. And besides this, how much happiness the crank gets out of life! Too vain to see himself as others see him, and impervious to snubs and laughter, he is a man with an idea—is something or has something worth while; and this vanity sustains and exalts him like a balloon, which wafts one over the heads and chimneys of other people, and up into the clouds, though its filling and motive power be only gas. There are hobbies, it is true, that would seem to be simply morbid and depressing, yet out of which, evidently, the riders get great satisfaction. I have

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known girls, for instance, of whom the undertakers would speak as always present at funerals. And one of my own elders was never so much of a gentleman, so brisk and vivacious, and withal so thoroughly pleasant, as when in charge of the funeral of a friend. For the unpleasant is with some itself an attraction and a stimulus, and anything of this kind within their own history or experience may become an incident and a hobby for life. A good woman of my congregation always dated events from the year she had her carbuncle ; would say, " It was in such or such a year after I had my carbuncle," and would then look at you in pleased expectation that you would wish to hear the oft-repeated story. It was the one remarkable thing in a commonplace and uneventful life, as interesting, she supposed, to others as to herself ; to listen was sympathy, which did her good and made her feel that she had not lived entirely in

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vain—sympathy which could only have been improved upon by presenting her, for daily reading, with Talmage's sermon on "Boils." This would have enlarged her field of thought by enabling her to make happy comparisons between Hezekiah's boil, those incident to the body politic as given by Talmage, and the vastly superior carbuncle of her own experience. But, if morbid, this woman's hobby was at least human and natural. One thing she never did: she never afflicted the ears of her friends with the imaginary merits of some ugly, uninteresting, and utterly vicious pug, poodle, or Skye terrier; never carried one through the streets; never could have been like the aristocratic fine lady who, when her favorite had bitten a piece from a gentleman's leg, anxiously inquired if it would not "make dear little Fido sick"; or like the worthy dame, mentioned by John Brown, who said she was very tired of

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minced veal, but then, "Dutchy liked it so much"!

It must, on the other hand, be confessed that some hobbies are very quaint and amusing. They hurt nobody, and merely add to the spice and variety of life. The French lady who, with such delicious frankness, said she "would commit a base-ness for the sake of fried potatoes," hurt nobody, unless herself, which is quite possible. One must draw a line somewhere in fried potatoes, or have the doctor. Cæsar may have shown a queer weakness and vanity, for so great a man, in oiling his hair so much, especially considering how thin it was; but it annoyed no one so long as he refrained from bad pomades. Napoleon's hobby for white casimere breeches was perhaps somewhat costly, since he would spill his ink and gravy and coffee over them; but I think the nation would willingly have compromised on more gravy

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and less blood. And in Lady Walpole's case, who had the feminine hobby for putting away things, when she waked her husband late at night with the question, "Husband dear, where have you put your white waistcoat?" after all, it was only her husband, and the good man, no doubt, quietly put himself to sleep again. On the other hand, when Mrs. Agassiz found a cold lizard in her slipper one morning, he only said, "But, my dear, where are the other five?" It was her own fault; she should have emptied his pockets beforehand, and not have allowed valuable lizards and snakes to roam so recklessly. All his life Dr. Johnson had a voracious appetite for a leg of mutton. Certainly—perhaps on the principle that "like cures like"—it never made him sheepish; for he was always a bear, and perhaps that had something to do with his fondness for mutton. For days at a time the only way to get

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Pope out of bed at Lord Bolingbroke's was to angle for him with a dish of stewed lampreys. This would bring him down to table quickly.

But even innocent hobbies, i.e., even such personal eccentricities, may be very annoying, like the too free use of musk to the delicate nose. I have known people whose hobby was simply fine and delicate feelings, soft, velvety, and fine as puss, which, unfortunately, they did not keep at home, but rode everywhere. Fine feelings are one thing, but fine feelings as a hobby are quite another. Whatever pleasure one may get out of thinking how very fine they are, and, perhaps, how unfeeling the rest of the world, it is an unpleasant fact that these tender souls are apt to be touchy, and, like puss, to conceal under their velvet a very quick-working mechanism of sharp claws. These people make life a burden with their readiness to take

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offense. Life is very much of a street-car, full of hurrying and jostling and sometimes clumsy passengers; and tender toes, if thrust too much forward, will be sure to be stepped on. It is as much as one can do whose corns are reasonable and moderate, and who does not wear fancy boots, to keep a good and Christian temper in this hurry and jam of all sorts of people. It is a worse hobby, however, because it deliberately steps on others' toes, where one, as I once knew a professedly Christian woman to do, makes it a point to speak her mind, as she called it, to everybody. Not in that way did Hamlet "unpack his soul" and relieve it of his thoughts. Frank and genial woman! Her friends and acquaintances were ninepins, life a bowling-alley, in which she was to bowl down as many as she had time and strength for, till death should come and bowl her out. It was in vain I suggested to her,

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although not one of my sheep, the propriety and duty of first being sure of her facts and then of her mind. And it was my frequent privilege to follow her with my oil-can, to pour oil upon the angry waters stirred up by her pestiferous hobby. In Walton Church, England, is still to be seen, I believe, an old article of church furniture called a "brank," or "scold's bridle," as in those days they also had in use for such the ducking- or cucking-stool; after all, a compliment to the womanhood of the day, since it implied that scolding was so un-womanly and unseemly that it must be put down with bit and bridle. I do not know whether the Puritans imported this useful article into New England. Those whose hobby is namby-pambyism in general have made the Puritan their butt and stock phrase for all bigotry, and have much to say of Connecticut blue laws which never existed. His theory of life was a high one, if

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too one-sided. They tried to maintain it by law and rigid discipline against offenders ; unsuccessfully, of course, because they went too far and interfered with such personal matters as expenses, dress, prinking, and the like, as well as the more public morals. Nevertheless, they were very gallant toward women, i.e., with the exception of scolds and like public nuisances. Even the tithing-men, who had charge of ten families each, if they caught a woman napping in church would gently brush her face with the fox-tail which was at one end of their long white wand ; if it was a man they would rap him on the head with the knob at the other end. Of course these old Puritan people made themselves very disagreeable to others of their own day, and would be quite detestable nowadays. Society women, for instance, would scurry from the ball-room quickly were they to see Governor Winthrop's dignified form

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entering the door, and very wisely for themselves. But, with all this to be said, have we not seen cases, like the above-mentioned woman, where we really thought quite charitably of the cucking-stool and the scold's bridle? If we may quote nature as a part of the argument, nature says rigidly that offenses against the peace and well-being of the community must pay the penalty; and I have a striking little instance. It is well known that the sparrows are a chattering little folk, very noisy, very intrusive, and quarrelsome with other birds—a sort of feathered street-gamin; but it is not so well known how rigidly they execute their own social laws. A friend of mine was recently attracted by a great chattering of sparrows in a myrtle-tree outside her window. On further look, she saw one sparrow standing by itself on a branch, a sorrowful-minded culprit, evidently wishing it hadn't. Then for a time

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there was a violent chattering to and fro—manifestly the lawyers in the case doing their best for the money. My friend did not know enough of their language to find out what the offense was, but presently there was a general chatter, meaning that the jury had brought in a verdict of guilty ; for then one sparrow, evidently the sheriff, flew out, clutched the condemned by the throat, shook it and shook it till it fell down through the myrtle-tree, and there was a sparrow less in the social life of the town ; then, this duty accomplished, the jury went about its business. Nature, at least, believes in maintaining public virtue and punishing offenders, which was the social theology of the Puritans.

Ministers, you know, are the private advisers and resort of all classes, and on all sorts of matters—matters not confined to the religious. The beggar or tramp—kind neighbors pass him along to the minister ;

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and, lest he should lose his way, point out the house. Book-agents come straight to the door, and the lightning-rod man withholdeth not himself. Hobbyists of all kinds find him out; no slight intended to other people, but because with each it is a proper compliment to Christianity to give him the first call. But when a hobby gets stabled in the brain of one of his own congregation his pathway may not be strewn with flowers, nor may he hear just the kind of birds he would like singing overhead in the branches; for a hobby means persistence and often something more. To mention no other from the fly-leaf of memory, how delicate to deal with must be that of the scribbler whose eccentricity it is to think she writes poetry! One such would evolve from her inner consciousness, in half an hour after dinner, what was duly labeled a poem. There was a bookful. There was not the jingle of

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sleigh-bells on a frosty night, full of sentiment and pleasure; it was blank verse, of a kind that an English epitaph would have suited and been sufficient for the whole bookful:

“ Here lieth, wrapped in clay,
The body of William Wray;
I have no more to say ”;

or another American one, with its deep sense of mystery (i.e., as to why it was called poetry):

“ My husband—
The Lord knows why.”

But as kind and appreciative friends thought it should not waste its sweetness, her minister was asked to read it, give an opinion, then, if he approved it, to revise, correct, get a publisher to take it, and would have been asked to write an introduction to the favored world. I do not say how he got out of it, but he did do

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so, and without, as might have been expected, making an enemy of injured vanity. Only publishers can tell how many such hobbies are nipped with necessary frost every year.

If now we come back to the general public, this country has a fine air for hobby-riding. Hobbies spring up and abound in all manner of eccentric shapes. Some, like roller-skating, you can localize in rinks, just as inveterate smokers are shut up in the smoking-car; but others are ubiquitous and aggressive. For all diseases of the body politic, as well as human ills, there are one hundred panaceas—hobbies, some of them worse than eccentric, dangerous. They shape the questions of the day, and constitute their dangers. But leaving these, and in a lighter vein, what queer specimens the soil produces! Here is one, his hobby simply that this is a free country. He meets you; you do not know

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him, nor want to, but he wants to know you, and that is enough for this bird of freedom. Conventionalities of society, its unwritten code for the protection of individual rights, tastes, and comfort,—in other words, the proper limitations of freedom,—do not trouble him if he wants a thing, has a hobby to indulge or some end to gain. One of this kind stepped up to the Duke of Argyle, when the President was showing him and his family the Cesnola museum, put out his hand, and said: “The Duke of Argyle, I believe; my name is Pomeroy, and I am not ashamed of it; glad to make your acquaintance!” And then, undoubtedly, he went home and said casually here and there: “Met the Duke of Argyle in New York; had some talk with him; nice man—not stuck up.” The duke supposed all the time that he was one of the directors, though a queer one. But in the same way the aggressive hobby meets

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you everywhere, in Joseph's coat of many colors, but with what Joseph had not—an unlimited stock of cheek, push, and impudence. The fact is that we, the great American public, are a hobby-ridden community, and submit to it. The young gentleman on his bicycle meets you on the sidewalk, if it suits his convenience, and we, ladies and all, turn into the road. We go to a party, as per invitation; the young folks want to dance, and we, the elderlies of a past generation, are informed how beautiful we would look as statuary in the corner with our toes well gathered in. Or we go to a hotel with one parlor, and, for the same reason, being still elderlies, are soon made to understand that our room (number so-and-so, third or fourth floor) is better than our company, and we gracefully submit and seek the suggested retirement. But the fact is, also, that we are an amiable people; moreover, that more than

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any other nation we hate undue trouble; and, moreover, that we are a wise people, who take in the situation and act accordingly. In a free country one cannot escape the disagreeable, but he can lessen it by the manner in which he takes it. Thus it is best to give a tramp a piece of stale bread and some cold potatoes, but not an invitation to call again. It is best, in passing a beehive, to give the bees no excuse for getting angry or for drawing disagreeable conclusions. Hobbyists are apt to be touchy; some of them have great fluency of speech, and some of them an inexhaustible amount of abuse and defamation. It is best, and saves your own time, to give a bully the sidewalk if he insists upon it. This mode of dealing with notoriously ill-tempered individuals and social annoyances in general may strike an Englishman as decidedly strange, but it is American. One can put out his own

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strength if necessary, as the nation did in the late war. But wisdom says, do not whip an ugly horse till you can get out of the buggy; and if a donkey be touchy, although you may not respect him for it, and especially if he be built upon fairly good business principles, the best way is (i.e., it saves time and trouble) to let him severely alone.

After all, no one is entirely well rounded. There is sure to be a weakness somewhere for charity to overlook, and a little too much vanity or pride may easily bulge into a hobby. Moreover, everything in this world is given its specialty. It is not at random that the bee visits and probes for its honey this rather than that flower, even of the same species. A man's strength as well as his weakness may lie in following out his one idea, i.e., in riding his hobby. One cannot do everything, or even many things, equally well. And there was sense,

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if quaintness, in the dying remark to his son of the German professor who had spent thirty years of his life on the Greek verb, that "he had made a great mistake; he should have confined himself to the future tense"; in other words, he had undertaken too much, and just then the future tense seemed more than ever important. It all depends, first, upon what kind of a hobby a man is riding, and, second, with what amount of common sense he rides it. Of many hobbies and hobbyists I can only say, this is a free country; but, if they have no objections, I should prefer they would not seek pasture in my dooryard. And as to the race of pronounced cranks, if the President has any difficulty in finding a "mission" for them, I would suggest the cannibal islands with an attractive salary, as he could keep a relay on the road, and it would "encourage business" and "reciprocity" among the islanders. A great

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manipulator of values away up in the millions said that hobbyists and cranks were filing into his office all day long—as a kindly philanthropist, no doubt, though it was not exactly his reputation. It is known that these men can scent a philanthropist at any distance and in any crowd. Quite lately one of the sort dashed across Nassau Street to me, singled me out, presumably as a philanthropist, although perhaps he took me for a stranger fallen unwarily into dangerous company (since it was near Wall Street), and he meant to see me through. So, doubtless, they looked upon the great manipulator of values with his millions; else why crowd his staircase and office? What is a Thanksgiving turkey for, if not to be plucked and eaten? Plucked? oh, no! Disheartened by the rebuffs of the hard world around, they want sympathy, something helpful—philanthropy. And he gives it, gives liberally. “Gentlemen,”

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we can almost hear him say, "there is a popular fallacy that 'honesty is the best policy.' Do not be deceived; it is not so. It should be the appearance of honesty. The most successful gambler in the city always wore a white cravat and dressed like a clergyman. And so I say, gentlemen, whatever you do or have to offer, keep up the appearance of honesty. The cheese in your trap, if it be not good, let it be strong and appear to be good, and the greediness of the mice will do the rest." They listen, and go forth strengthened by the great man's wisdom.

Humanity is a queer and perplexing study. Spurzheim made a chart of many different human faces which corresponded almost exactly with the faces of different animals. And when we study the scientific question of "man's place in nature," there are things which, if taken alone, give

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a certain basis to the German Oken's declaration that "man is the sum total of all the animals." Why does an owl, sitting and blinking on a branch, always suggest an old man or woman laden with unspeakable wisdom, unless for some facial resemblance between them? A physician recently called my attention to a family where the girls in face all resembled rats—not a pleasant and pretty compliment, perhaps; but, then, rats have beautiful eyes, skins that make the finest of gloves, are very intelligent, and as for their beautifully fitting fur sacks, they are "just too nice for anything!" And if we come to character, what are burglars and thieves, including many who appear to be honest, but human rats, wolves, foxes, hyenas, preying upon others, taking and making no return, whose sole aim and effort is to get, regardless of others? Or look at the

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strange resemblances in the vegetable world. Alas! the poor flies; how they are taken in and deceived! The confiding innocents of the world! *Rafflesia* is a remorseless, deliberate, and utter swindle, deceiving by an appearance of honesty. They light on it, and in its central cup find what seems a nest for the young flies, and one full of nourishment till their wings are grown. They go away trusting and contented; but *Rafflesia*, like a cruel executor, takes all for itself and leaves nothing for the young flies. Likewise the "grass of Parnassus," found in the British bogs, offers them, on the petals of its white flowers, what seems to be a drop of very fine honey. Delusion! a showy, deceitful advertisement! for, touch it, and it is a hard, pellucid ball. But the flies do not know that, and, in the innocence and honesty of their own nature, go from one to another, only to find disappointment and a stone. So in the world of men the


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same thing goes on, even in our better and professedly Christian civilization, this putting off on others the worthless pretense, without a thought of shame, remorse, or compunction, so long as it pays.



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“How doth the little busy bee
Improve each shining hour,
And gather honey all the day
From every opening flower!”

O says Dr. Watts in one of his once well-known hymns for children—pellets of wisdom, sugar-coated with verse and illustration for ease in taking; this special hymn being a lesson of industry extracted from the honey-bee. Not, however, “from *every* opening flower” does she gather honey, only from flowers

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of a kind. As nature's agent in distributing the precious pollen from one to another, she must not mix incongruous elements. That is one of her instincts. But she is truly "the little busy bee," with a genuine instinct for work, perpetual motion, devotion to duty. No farmer's wife laden with the cares of her position, up by daylight, astir all day, and lengthening it well into night with a fine batch of mending, and this day after day, till death breaks the thread of her drudgery, can excel in genius for work and industry "the little busy bee." You may, indeed, see her betimes going in and out, up and down among the scented fields, roving and rambling here and there, as it were without purpose or anything to do, which is the definition of the word "to gad"; but she never goes gadding, nor is it to gossip that she visits the doorway of the flowers. Her nimble tongue is busy gathering up the nectar which in due time she

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will regurgitate into the honeycomb; and after securing the nectar she will load every pocket upon her thighs with pollen rolled into pellets, the material for wax—just a preparative for those other duties at home, to which instinct impels her with the push of destiny; duties not for herself in the case of any one of them. The individual is nothing, the society and its well-being and preservation everything. And what a wonderful society it is, with what wonderful instincts! Here is a feminine monarchy, the produce of one common mother, the queen, and numbering twelve thousand or perhaps sixty thousand. Males are at an absolute discount; no sale for them, not worth their salt, of no use whatever; have no stings to fight with, no pockets to hold anything; do no work; nothing but sun themselves, or get in the way, or eat up the bee-bread and honey. Why, then, should they live, these super-

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fluous drones, a simple bother to their hard-working maiden sisters, mere consumers of hard-earned bee-bread and honey? Therefore they kill them, drag out their carcasses, and go on with the work. And work they must; no time to be idle, for the queen is not—*she* never stops to cackle; she has her stint to accomplish, in view of the next bee census, and means it shall be done, “if it takes all summer.” And they, too, the workers and attendants upon her prodigious industry, must have the busy instinct alert; what they do must be done, as the farmer gathers in his hay, before winter and foul weather come. And what a fine instinct it is, as we see them arranging and watching the cells—see them by groups, or, if necessary, all together, fanning the air with their wings to reduce the too warm temperature to a proper degree, or, again, with careful cleanliness unknown in the city with its filth and

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smells, observing every sanitary rule. Such communism, such a federation of labor, might be worth something! But it requires the dead level of instinct, an iron engine on an iron rail. Reason must pay the price of free agency, and so must a republic. Expel the lame and the lazy, abolish poverty, boycott the evils of our condition, and they will return again. Human nature is not that clock-like organism, instinct.

It is now to be said, however, that instinct is not, as we are apt to suppose, invariable. Change of environment or circumstance may change it, and this latter change become hereditary. Some honey-bees were once taken to the West Indies, and finding there ample provision of nature without work or expense to themselves, they grew idle and vicious, veritable hoodlums, and improved "each shining hour" in stinging the negroes. When did a

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hoodlum ever resist the temptation to pull the queue of a Chinaman and startle him with a kick? But so do loaded guns sometimes kick, practical jokes return as boom-rangs, and labor strikes end in loss to their contrivers. It was easy enough for these bees, so to speak, to get the strike "on," that is, to get the sting in; but to withdraw it without injury or tearing themselves to pieces, that was a thing not so easy. To rotate gingerly upon their center of gravity, unscrew the sting and leave it hard and fast in the negro cuticle, if the antics of the stung negro would allow it—such, for some of them at least, was the only way out of their predicament and folly. Meantime, however, what became of the original instinct—the working, comb-making instinct? And at this point recall what a wonderful one it is, involving a problem of the highest complexity; viz., of three mathematical forms,—the triangle,

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the square, and the hexagon,—to select that one on which to construct cells in juxtaposition and of any number, not only with the least waste, but with absolutely no waste, of space or material! A problem, this, which genius might work at long before solving, yet which “the little busy bee” works out unerringly in all her swarms by simple instinct. But this instinct may be lost, may succumb to the environment, and descendants of these very bees there might be without it. For nature has an imperial and imperious law, applicable to plants, animals, and man, to organs, instincts, or functions: that what is disused or superfluous shrinks, deteriorates, and even disappears. And (not to stop here with the thought, it is so important) what is it that the Bible also teaches? Is it anything more than this, that the same law extends to man’s spiritual part, his soul? To neglect it; with every other power of

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nature kept in culture, to leave this one—what relates to the spiritual and eternal—unexercised and uncared for; this is to assure for it a fate fixed by inexorable and universal law. The Bible, in kindly warning, merely reveals this all-important truth: that man—the whole man, body and soul, for all his existence, present and future—belongs to a system which, if it has rewards, has also penalties. Man, too, like everything else, is a being under law. This world, all heathendom, lies around us, how abundant in its evidences of the inexorable result of the breach of law, of the loss and deterioration and degradation which are its natural penalty! Just as it is with the crustacea in the dark pools of the Mammoth Cave: they once had eyes; to look at them they have the semblance of eyes yet; but behind the glassy balls lies a mass of ruins; the optic nerve itself is a shrunken, useless thread.

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I have thus far spoken of instinct without defining it; and a good definition to begin with, as every one knows, a fence to delimit from other ideas the one intended, would give a quietus to much controversy. He is a brawler of the saloon sort who aims a chair or a bottle at another's head without stopping to inquire, "Sir, what did you mean by such and such a remark?" But it is very difficult to define instinct, and especially to draw the boundary line between it and reason. Darwin speaks of it as "memory transmitted from generation to generation." Yet memory—what is it? The power of re-collecting past events and ideas, of going back mentally, as it were, into the past and re-collecting what we had left there, in one place or another, "till called for," till our return. We have that power in relation to ourselves; but is anything thus, i.e., by memory, "transmitted from generation to generation"? Darwin, however,

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had to account for instinct in accordance with his theory of evolution. For example, a certain insect, the sphex, invariably stings a spider in the nerve-center, thus paralyzing but not killing it. It is then deposited alongside her egg in the ground, and remains paralyzed, a toothsome, juicy morsel for the grub when it first peeps from the shell. What knowledge of the anatomy of the spider, of structure and nerve-centers! what a discriminating use of her own poison—just enough to paralyze for a certain time without killing! Since it was not a primitive endowment, how got this peculiar species this most extraordinary instinct, i.e., how may we suppose it to have been first evolved? Why, says Darwin, bees show great “intelligence”; that is, as will be seen, to explain instinct he has to fall back upon a primitive and unproved intelligence such as, by his theory, ought not to be there;

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and "I suppose it not improbable," he continues, that the aboriginal sphex "originally stung in any part of the body." But one or more of these intelligent creatures after a while observed that when they hit the nerve-center—one of the happy accidents that have given the clue to so many improvements—"their prey was at once paralyzed." Of course, being so intelligent, they at once saw the use they might make of it in bettering the fare of their young; in other words, providing them a better table, improving the quality and flavor of their meat when they ushered themselves, very hungry, into the world; and thus, by natural selection, the proper place to sting a spider and the amount of poison to be used became an instinct, a "memory transmitted from generation to generation." The best explanation Darwin could give on the line of his theory, admits his ablest pupil (Romanes). But

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the suggestion falls far short of the difficulty. Another species of sphex, whose specialty is the grasshopper, has to sting three nerve-centers in succession to induce paralysis; and another, whose larvæ are partial to fat caterpillar, must puncture nine such centers in succession. The explanation fails to explain. It requires us to suppose too much and grant too much, as extreme evolutionists are apt to, without a particle of proof. We must predicate too many happy accidents, too much special intelligence at the beginning, to make it a reasonable solution of these marvelous instincts and adaptations. So, without trespassing farther upon moot questions of origin, let us come to this one, What *is* instinct? Nature's outfit, independent of teaching or experience, for each species in the life it is to lead; an inward impulse combined with the requisite skill which enables it and every member of it to do

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instantly, when occasion arises, and to do perfectly, what is needful for its welfare or preservation. It is not genius or intellect exercising itself upon a problem of mathematics which enables the bee at once to build her honeycomb. That would take her out of her sphere in nature's congeries. It is an intuitive gift of nature. Just as the soldier in his regiment goes forth equipped for the common exigencies or the extraordinary emergencies of war, so issues forth the grub from its silken tent, its formative cocoon, fully equipped with instinct. And it is one—for each species and variety its own; one cast of the die, such as distinguishes the dollar from the cent. Nothing about instinct is more remarkable than this—how it differentiates species into trades, professions, specialties, in every possible variety. Thus among bees, as an example, besides the honey-bee with her comb we have the carpenter-bee, that

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drills out a nest for her young, makes an "apartment house" in our woodwork; the mason-bee, the upholsterer, the leaf-cutter the clothier. And as an instinct, how wonderful that of the latter! The temperature of her young in the nest must be kept at a certain point; but sometimes, for reasons of her own, she builds it near metal, perhaps in a lock, which would quickly abstract the heat. She knows that by instinct. How does she provide against it? She goes to certain woolly-leaved plants, scrapes off the wool, and felts the outer surface, precisely as does the skilled engineer with his boiler, to prevent loss of heat.

And thus we come to man, the thinker, whose native outfit for life is reason. Not that he too has not instincts of nature. He does many of the same things by the same inward impulse—must do them to live. He too is on one side of him animal;

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but he is not, like creatures of instinct, confined to a groove. Whatever intelligence these may display, it is a simple addendum to their one ruling instinct. Man can think out for himself, invent, apply to use, the results of a hundred instincts; can turn his view inward and analyze himself; or, when he pleases, can range the abstract and the infinite. In Siberia there is a little rodent, just like a rabbit, which in autumn cuts the best grasses, spreads them out to dry in the sun, then forms them into haystacks, so placed as to shelter them from the rain and snow. It then makes a tunnel from its house to the bottom and interior of each stack, in order to get its meal of hay without disturbing the outer and protecting thatch. There are also agricultural ants. Look out, and you see the farmer doing much the same. Where is the difference? The farmer can go home, light his evening fire or pipe, which

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no other creature can do, and he can then, if he so chooses, study out the laws and reasons appertaining to mind and matter. But even he cannot originate. As said Kepler concerning his three celebrated laws which were the germ of Newton's discoveries, "I think thy thoughts after thee, O God!"

Let us now for a little turn to some of the curios of instinct, things eccentric, off the common, and some of them, it may be, having a suggestion, a sniff in the air, of humor. We must not rob nature and those below us of all sentiment, as if it was to be found only in ourselves, and reduce everything to hard and dry utility. There is a deal of *pathos* in nature; to my thinking, more than we commonly suppose. When the dog lies down upon his master's grave and dies there, we do, indeed, recognize it as pathetic--pathetic faithfulness, pathetic grief. What anxiety and distress

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are in the actions and tones of birds, sometimes, when their young are in danger! it is plaintive to hear and see them. And away down among the insects, can we say there is no feeling, no motherly anxiety, no pathetic side of life? Look, for instance, at this little one. Upon some branch she has just made a soft bed with fur from her own body. Upon this bed she lays in layers a certain number of eggs, and covers them all up with more fur, daintily disposed as a waterproof wrapper. It takes her two days, during which she has adopted every expedient she can to make the whole secure and safe. What for? For future grubs that she will not live to see. With the making of that nest her work is done. She has done for them in advance the best she could, for their sakes has stripped her own body of its clothing of fur, and dies. Is there nothing in her act for thought, nothing

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motherly, nothing pathetic? Mere instinct! Perhaps so, and merely an insect; yet motherly love and care and tenderness are everywhere an instinct. Self-sacrifice characterizes it; and in God's world self-sacrifice for others is the highest of virtues—therefore, as an instinct, beautifully mixed with the pathetic. Down in her lowliness this little infinitesimal casts in her "mite" into this treasury of self-sacrifice—nay, her all, since it is first her clothing and then her life. To the ordinary naturalist, perhaps,—one devoted to a science,—she is merely a specimen to be examined, classified, and put away. He is not looking for more, and so sees not how her instinct illustrates, how perfectly and beautifully, the grandest of moral ideas. In like manner in human life, how often we pass by, how often dismiss with a slur, the poor and humble,—do it because they are such, thus sometimes leaving undiscovered what

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we might have found among them—lives the most noble, true to the best instincts, full to the lip of generous and genuine self-sacrifice! On the other hand, how we sometimes magnify utterly out of their proper place the selfish or frivolous or ignoble—people with whom, to quote a Dutch proverb, “self’s the man.” That little one whose remarkable existence I have just sketched (and it is a whole species) must wait long, and seldom gets an observer. Obituaries and epitaphs fulsomely praise the others, bedaub them with virtues they never had, or, in default of anything to say, mention the number of clubs they belonged to—the “Fat Man’s,” and so forth. How much better, because more truthful and simple, the French statistical method, as seen in the following inscription:

“Regretted by his father and mother,
Two brothers, three sisters,
One aunt, two uncles,

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One female cousin, two male cousins,
His grandmother on his father's side,
And numerous friends."

Of course the "numerous friends" is mere padding to fill out the lines; but for the rest, grief how accurately weighed and distributed; "regretted," "one aunt," "one female cousin," and so forth, sum total fourteen! How simple, chaste, scrupulously exact and truthful the enumeration! But why not more aunts and female cousins? Why, the inference is plain, with scarce an attempt at disguise: the rest "regretted" him not at all!

To touch another point, however, is there anything in instinct like humor? Apparently there is. The catbird, as an instance, seems to bubble over with fun. He throws himself into all manner of attitudes, insulting, provoking, or vivacious, and just delights in teasing or alarming other birds. One of the kind, that had

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the liberty of a room where were two caged goldfinches, actually selected the most timid of the two for a butt; would crouch down, jerk his tail, and look as if about to annihilate her; would then ruff himself, look terrible, spread his legs apart, bluster at her, and make feints of coming, till poor little goldfinch was frightened out of her small wits, to his intense delight. Or if her cage was covered, he would give the cover a sudden twitch, or bounce noisily down upon the end of her perch, and wait to hear how she took it; and this he continued for months, precisely like a school-boy, just for the fun of the thing! Indeed, there is much human nature in a catbird. Let any one attempt to outdo this impish fellow as a singer, or in anything, and his jealousy and ire were up at once; resembling herein a certain colonel of the war concerning a regiment in camp near by. A Baptist minister who was asking his per-

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mission to preach remarked as an inducement that he had already immersed fourteen of that regiment. "Fourteen, sir!" said the colonel, rising. "Sergeant, detail fifteen men, and have them immersed at once; they shall not get ahead of us in that way!"

Was there no humor in the act, quiet and sly, though masked under seriousness, when, in the Garden of Plants, an orang-outang took his cane from a venerable old naturalist whose figure and costume were both singular, bent his back and hobbled round, supporting himself upon the cane precisely as the old gentleman did, and then with great gentleness returned him the cane? Was there no humor in it? Did not the arch look imply as plainly as words, "Yes, we are really alike, doubtless of the same ancestry; I recognize in you a man and a brother"? Another incident in the Transvaal, however, was

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humor after a different sort—the grim and wicked, such as King John perpetrated upon Isaac of York when he drew his teeth to get his gold. Some wasps, whose sting is particularly painful, had placed their nests on a species of shrub whose fruit was a great attraction to baboons. But how to get at it? At last an inspiration seized the old autocrat of one band. Why had no one thought of it before? It was as original as it was effective. He was seen through a glass pitching young baboons at the nests, by which grimly witty expedient he set the whole angry swarm after the screeching youngsters, whose going lacked neither spurs nor speed. He then, this witty old baboon, complaisantly helped himself, his own young wife and little ones, leaving the rest to feed upon their reflections or suck their thumbs, as they pleased; some of whom (may we not venture to assume?), espe-

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cially those youngsters, were not meeting the occasion with that trained sweetness of mind displayed by the Scotch open-air preacher who, unknown to himself, was standing upon an ant-hill. He bore it well till he reached his fifthly, and then said in a patient tone, "My hearers, I trust the grace of God is in my heart, but I think the deil himself has got into my breeks!" Such humorous old sinners as that baboon we have among ourselves, callous, heartless, selfish. But humor lies in the queer device, some oddity, some quaint mode of expression or doing things; it may exist as an instinct of nature, even unconsciously on the part of its possessor. We see it so sometimes in the lower Irish, who get off wit and make humorous blunders in utter innocence of it. What a neat bit of humor, furtive wit, was that of the car-driver in Ireland! As they passed a gallows on the way, a passenger said, "Pat,

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if that gallows had its due, where would *you* be?" "Standing here alone, sir," he instantly replied. Pat makes blunders betimes; but with a different air and flavor from that of the awkward John Bull in London who introduced Mrs. Foot, and then her daughters as the Misses Feet! Humor sometimes lies in the very unfitness of words and acts to occasions. Witness this chaffer between two Scotchmen—the undertaker and the husband of a woman whose acidulous tongue and temper were well known in those parts. The time had come to pay the bill—five shillings. "It is too much; I'll give you three!" "Naw." "Well, here's four; take it!" "Naw; five it is, or up she coomes!"

Let it not be thought I am drawing a too close parallel between man and animals in the matter of instinct. Are we not relatives—cousins one knows not

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exactly how many times "removed"? On the other hand, and as touching not relationship, but likeness, I must confess myself startled to read (and as the opinion of a leading physiologist) that of all others the common hog, *Sus scrofa* by name, was "a creature especially suitable for comparison with man"! Hear it, society! With all your pretensions, your most "suitable" comparison the common hog! And, in truth, occasional facial resemblances and a quite common disposition to grunt over things must be admitted. Whether science would call these the "survival of the fittest for the struggle of existence" I cannot tell. Certainly we do see persons with these and other marked resemblances to *Sus scrofa* getting ahead in life even better than others not so constituted. Our physiologist, however, says first that "the headquarters of the hog are in the same regions which have supported the

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greatest and oldest known communities of men." But to me "headquarters" suggested hind quarters and a doubt. We know that to-day, headquarters and hind quarters, they are both out West. Still, if his premises are granted, it does seem to make a fair and logical and every way "suitable comparison" to select parties reared "in the same regions," under the same climatic and other influences; to wit, *Sus scrofa* and "the greatest" as well as "oldest communities of men." Dwelling so long side by side, it should be possible for science to decide accurately which increased most rapidly, say in intelligence and culture, and which exerted the most influence upon the other in these respects. It may even settle some questions as to the future of our western country. Certainly the result in Ireland does not settle the questions involved. As every one knows, the arrangements there were for-

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merly every way "suitable" and happy for such "comparison"; the place of piggy in the family circle most favorable, till British landlordism came in and spoiled the scientific value of the evidence. To what greater growth piggy might have attained, to what greatness Ireland, through this intimacy of the races, who can now say? In distraining and evicting piggy, so weighty a factor in the problem of Irish home life and civilization, they made a great, great mistake, sure to raise an outcry—one cause of the present "home-rule" excitement and cry, which has so enlisted Gladstone's sympathies: "To every shanty freedom, and a suite of rooms for its own pig!" Our physiologist makes it a special point of "comparison" that hogs and men can alone eat any and everything. Alas! in Ireland there has hitherto been too little to eat, fairly to test the question either as to quality or quantity. Perhaps here in

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America we can judge better; and may we not concede it to science, as a matter attested by common observation, that there are people to be found whose only "suitable comparison," both in eating and acting, is *Sus scrofa*? But leaving it to scientists to upturn the real root of the matter, in imitation of piggy's own investigating habits, I prefer a resemblance in instinct of a sweeter kind, belonging to a bird, the wild duck. See her endeavoring to divert a dog from the hiding-place of her chicks—her purpose serious enough, but her methods how comic! What an actress she is! what a consummate artist by nature and not teaching!—flirting her wing before him like a fan, brushing his very nose, and then off a ways, pretending a broken wing and going slowly and laboriously just out of his reach—a part of the play, the broken-wing episode, which evolution cannot satisfactorily explain.

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And no dog, however experienced, can resist a run after her—such a beauty and so inviting, just dodging his nose, so near, and yet, in truth, so far! Ah, there are “dear little ducks” (we call them so) with the same gifts of nature, who could give points to both dog and duck in the art of flirting, had they but the wings; yet, having them not, they can pretend a sprained ankle just as well.

I touch only one item more for its strangeness—the migratory instinct. Once in about ten years the rodent, rat-like lemmings of Norway and Sweden seem to hold a mass-meeting—business peremptory. They are too many, and some of them must sacrifice themselves for the good of the species. There is no hesitation; no pibroch wails their departure down the mountain-side; without ceremony, leave-taking, or any fuss, the requisite number—and an immense number it is—

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simply turns and goes, due west, across rivers, mountains, obstacles of any kind, till they reach the sea, the "wide, wide sea," the end of the lemming and his journey. Volunteered advice, we know, is seldom taken; but if it would help our own rats to a decision, we would say, "Go West, young rat, across the Mississippi, the great desert, the Rockies; the Pacific is a charming and refreshing sea!" Not the only kind of migration with the sea in view. Those little birds with feeble wing that reach the Mediterranean, but as an impassable barrier; whose instinct teaches them to await there the coming of a heron or a crane; that then nestle down contentedly between the outspread wings and are carried safely across—what a beautiful trust is theirs! what an emblem of the Christian's safe ferriage over when he starts out for the thithermost shore!

One point more, to close with. Since

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the Darwinian theory of evolution and natural selection came in, extremists have endeavored by it to account for everything, to make it a universal law. Now the question is as to its limitations. It does not account for everything; it cannot for man. Can it even for instinct? Natural selection is, by itself, simply the survival or preservation of the "fittest"—what has proved itself so in "the struggle for existence." What is every way adapted to survive survives—becomes a heredity; but it began to be an instinct, how? For instance, the instinct to build of the honey-bee. We are to suppose a honey-bee of some sort before ever it had constructed a cell or had the physical function of secreting wax for it. Then, somewhere in the past and somehow, an evolution took place. It has acquired the faculty of secreting wax and with it constructing its present system of cells. Its whole life has been changed;

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just as the life of a household or city, its whole social economy changes with the introduction of the appliances of electricity. But in what way came about this change, this evolution? Was it through happy accident utilized by bee genius? Did they discover that they could make wax, and experiment upon it, or did the idea of the cell come first? Did one bee, some great mechanical genius of his day and race, invent and perfect it all, or did it grow slowly into perfection? Did natural selection take it up at the beginning as the best and fittest to survive, perfect as at present, or only after ages of struggle and improvement? In either case, as a discovery or change or evolution at once perfected or slowly worked out, how was it to be transmitted and become instinctive? For, as we know, the queen-mother of all only indirectly has part in cell-making; her part is to provide the egg which is to occupy

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the cell; and of the workers who do it, not one ever has a descendant to whom or by whom could be transmitted this new discovery or evolution. Ingenuity may say so-and-so is possible or probable or "not improbable"; but that is not science; the proof is lacking. Moreover, consider that the problem to be explained is not a single one, and the explanation of that the end of the matter; that one thing in nature is constantly correlated with something else, one instinct with some other instinct or thing, in wonderful unison and harmony. How the problem grows on every hand! Evolution and natural selection alone cannot explain it. Back of this immense correlation, this network of forces, this perfect adjustment of things one with another, is what? The agnostic says, "I don't know." Nevertheless, the materialist has his ghost that will not down. It is the evidence of design and plan, the only

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argument the Bible condescends to urge for the existence of God. It simply appeals to our reason, our special gift as men, our power of putting two and two together and drawing conclusions. Can we wonder at Darwin's distress, in view of it? "Sometimes," he said to the Duke of Argyle, "I am overwhelmed by a sense of the presence of a personal God; and then," he added, sadly shaking his head, "it seems to go away!" Ah, but why did he not follow it up, as he did questions of science? At one point the evolutionist always has to stop—the question, What is life? Darwin was once asked it. "No man can answer that," he replied. "Then," pursued his questioner, "in all your search you find between matter and life a gulf, an abyss unspanned?" "Ah," he said, with an impetuous gesture, "that abyss often frightens me just as I am falling asleep!" Let one thing be understood, as now con-

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ceded even by Huxley, himself an agnostic: that no scientific evidence exists against the supernatural. So far as science is concerned, the Christian has just as good a right to place behind natural phenomena a spiritual cause, controlling and directing the order and manner of their occurrence, as has his opponent to attribute them to the unaided operation of natural laws. Very well; there we place a personal God, with the old arguments, deductions, and conclusions all back again. We see nature scintillating and glorious with "thought"—God's thoughts. Said a fine observer as he looked around, "What an imagination God has!" Yes; why not? Where do we get our own? What is it but a reflex image in the lake, a shadow of something existing up there in God? What an imagination it requires to invent a fine thing! One such invention, with certain modifications in the same line, is usually

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enough for a man's lifetime; it exhausts his capacity. Yet invention—what is it but to come to or upon, to find out, to discover, i.e., to take off the cover from something existent but hitherto concealed? To originate all things out of the fewest and simplest primeval elements—ah, “what an imagination God has!” There are two hundred thousand or more species of plants in the world; yet what is a plant or tree? From seed to fruit, simply the modification of a leaf; which led Thoreau to say, “The Maker of this earth has but patented a leaf.” And on that leaf, if you look, you will find a beforehand sketch, a miniature plan, of what the tree will be and what the arrangement of its branches. Or take, in conclusion, the various instincts of birds as to nesting—an instinct culminating in our own homes. Why all this wondrous variety? Not utility alone, for utility did not require it. Something more,

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something better, something pleasanter—an imagination running into the pleasant and kindly. Take that remarkable instinct of the bower-bird of Australia in building itself a bower. It is not for nesting; the real nest, I believe, has never yet been discovered. It is a large, arched assembly-room, built on the ground, of long and slender twigs, and ornamented with things bright and shining, whatever they can find to their taste—ribbons, shells, bits of china and glass, and the like. There they receive their friends, have music, “trip the light fantastic toe”—a mimic ball-room innocent of evil. And with this delightful sylvan scene I bring to an end my treatise on instinct.



Cobwebs

I HAVE chosen for a subject one that is neither "fish, flesh, nor fowl," a made-up dish of my own cooking, relating to things not found in the heavens, nor yet in the inferno, which has nothing to do with war, politics, literature, or any special country or place, though it might be found unpatented in the patent-office; I have chosen the subject of "Cobwebs."

Some years ago a circle of ladies in New

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York formed what they called the "Arachne Club," a name suggestive, if not ominous, since among the *Arachnida* are included spiders, mites, and scorpions. Still, as the word "Arachne" originally means to weave, that may be the meaning and purport of their name—the Weaving Club. But what do they weave? It may be cobwebs, the light and flimsy; while the fingers are busy the tongue may be weaving.

It may not be known, and yet be of interest to know, that the word "cob," in cobweb, is Old English for head, with some reference to size, but more to roundness and shape. A corn-cob, for instance, is the rounded head on which the corn grows, like crisp curls on some skulls. "The rich cobs of this world" were rich men whose fat money-bags and full, round stomachs suggested the title, without any reference to brains. In cobblestone we have both size and shape indicated, with

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the addition, perhaps, of putting together in a street; and as it is, at the best, but a poor and rough job,—what old New Yorker can ever forget its ups and downs?—hence the name “cobbler,” although the size and shape of the lap-stone may have identified it with the shoemaker. “Truly, sir,” says Shakspeare, “in respect of a fine workman, I am but, as you would say, a cobbler.” Of “sherry cobblers” I must confess I know nothing, and must refer you for the meaning to the initiated and learned in such matters. Whether the size or shape of the drink had anything to do with the name, I know not; only, as the drink is a cobbler, it undoubtedly makes a poor shoe of the drinker! It is easy to see, however, from the above, and considering its shape, how readily the acute observation and wit of a primitive people would fix upon the spider the name of atter- (or poison) cob.

As the web I am weaving, although not

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a member of the Arachne Club, requires it, let us begin at the cob, the warp and underlying thread being natural history, a study in itself beautiful, instructive, and for an inventor the very staple of his art. Wonderful little *spinder*, or spinner! As a familiar natural object, the poets and philosophers have made frequent use of the spider, sometimes as the representative of deceit and treachery, but oftener by some allusion to its spinning; for instance, the delicacy and fragility of its web, a simile too evident to be overlooked. Chaucer combines the two characteristics of the spider in application to woman in her physical weakness:

“Deceit, weeping, spinning, God hath yeven
To women kindly, while that they may liven.”

But for real and forceful beauty I prefer Isaiah. The Hebrews, let me say, had hardly an abstract term in their language; they had to paint abstract ideas with

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material colors—by similes and illustrations drawn from nature. It is one evidence of the antiquity and primitive character of the Hebrew language. Even with reference to God, the prominent idea of their religion, they had no words to express directly such thoughts as omnipotence, omniscience, or omnipresence. Thus the royal poet, in the One Hundred and Thirty-ninth Psalm, could only say :

“ Whither shall I go from thy spirit ?
Whither shall I flee from thy face ?
If I ascend into heaven,
There thou.
If I make my bed on the nether world,
Behold thou ! ”

—all concrete, material words and images, but the idea of omnipresence is fully there. Isaiah wishes to express the utter instability and folly of the hypocrite's hope. How does he do it? The man is leaning against his house as he thinks it, but that house is a spider's web! As it falls he

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still clutches desperately at its beams and rafters; but these are only the flimsy, unenduring strands of a spider's web, which his fall destroys. Of such hopes, which such men are continually spinning, he says again, "Their webs shall not become garments." The imagination was thus called into play, and made vivid what words could not express.

But now let us praise our grandmothers of a century or so ago. They could not equal the commonest house-spider, whose web they brushed remorselessly away, in deftness and beauty of work—could never have belonged to an Arachne Club. The old-fashioned spinning-wheel, now a piece of parlor bric-à-brac, was but a clumsy and primitive concern; but "their webs became garments"—the good old homespun, warranted from the start to wear everlastingly. Meanwhile they taught the children, wove into them homespun virtues

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and, without the blessed help of an Irish girl fresh from the bogs of Killarney, kept the house neat, orderly, and not a cobweb to be seen. If any spinning was to be done, except "street yarn," they preferred to do it themselves. Nevertheless, we must say it, in mere finger skill, with the same appliances, they have been far outdone by Eastern men and women. Witness those wonderful skeins of cotton, called with but slight hyperbole "webs of woven wind," exquisite to look upon, but utterly useless, so tenuous their thread as hardly to be discerned, while a pound of the material would stretch one thousand miles! What years of life that pound would represent! what a waste of eyes and mind and strength, even as sometimes, among ourselves, upon an empty female accomplishment!

The spider, however, to come to her, does nothing thus purposeless. That

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thread of hers is too precious. A certain quantity each year, enough for five or six webs, is all nature allows her; that is her working capital with which to meet and repair damages of wind, rain, beetles, and beetling brooms of housemaid and housewife. That web of hers, that fragile thing, but of which she must be so careful, represents her daily dinner, or that which rules the world,—rules Bismarck, Grover Cleveland, Mrs. Cleveland, Queen Victoria, the Pope at his devotions, no less than the spider,—an empty and imperious stomach. And for her purposes, what a marvel each thread! Just a drop of liquid, reaching the air through four or five thousand tiny orifices, their joint production at once hardens and is twisted together into a strand, how “exquisitely fine,” how even and yet wonderfully strong, for its strength the model of our chain-bridges! And yet, again, how quickly and easily made!

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A naturalist saw a spider of the gossamer kind run across his book, shoot out a thread, and sail off into the air. Not so quickly could the lightest yacht get her single sheet in place and give way to the breeze. The gossamer—as the poet calls it, “the spider’s most attenuated web”—which ladies so often imitate for head-wear, what in all nature or art can exceed it for delicacy or beauty of work, when, as Quarles says :

“Autumnal dews and sun
Do cobweb every green”;

or when, thus borne on “filmy pinions,” “threaden sails,” the little creatures make their annual exodus into the upper and invisible regions—an exodus which the Germans so beautifully call “the flitting summer.” Or take as an instance simply an ordinary web, such as we see it in summer. What a wonder of work! Without scutching or carding her mate-

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rial, with only, as the Bible calls them, her "hands" for tools, working backward and with no help from her eyes, as well at night as in the daytime, our spider draws out the right length, adapts it to any chosen by-place, crosses and recrosses with geometric skill, dots the upper threads with adhesive globules eighty or ninety thousand in number, and all within the space of forty minutes. Compare with this man's work, who must pull and pound and pommel and spend years in making his cable or bridge; and that, too, after stealing his invention, as Stephenson did, from some poor little spider in his study corner or out on the furze and grass-tops. Nevertheless, it is genius to apply in similitude and thought, as Beecher did, or in hard and unused substances and ways, as the inventor does, what the insect does by instinct, each species alike, and only one thing for a lifetime. Such an application

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deserves a patent, although taken directly from nature. Behold our cob and her web, now ready for inspection and use.

But it opens the way to ask, Why the general and almost vindictive aversion to the spider? Dr. Holmes has a somewhat recent and very interesting story entitled "A Mortal Antipathy." If any have not read it, this is the outline: A young girl accidentally drops a child (her own cousin), from her arms, without any perceptible injury; but as he grows up and into manhood he has "a mortal antipathy" to all young women—*young* women, not old. To meet one in the street gives him a spasm which endangers his life, and he is absolutely forced to become an utter, but unwilling and unhappy, recluse. It is a nervous disorder whose only manifestation, like the inability to breathe in the presence of cats, is this "mortal antipathy." One thing is certain about it: that it can never

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become epidemic or even endemic, i.e., local in spots, like goiter or malaria; no, nor any other demic, at least while nature retains in use the present pattern of young women. What results might follow any very decided revolution in their make-up cannot be told; for instance, should they be born with mustache and beards, or disposed to any great extent to be doctors and the like. However, nature knows better; the danger is not imminent, the present pattern is too good. In Dr. Holmes's story the interest centers in the cure. Both schools of medicine combine their energies. The principle is homeopathic—"Similia similibus," "a hair of the dog that bit you." But the therapeutics and the dose are not so; no mere pellet of a young woman, no trituration taken by spoonfuls, would answer in this case. It requires heroic treatment, and gets it. One day a superb girl, magnetic to her

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finger-tips, physically and intellectually the wonder and glory of her college, carries him bodily out of a burning hotel, where he lies helplessly sick. That dose, followed by others, which he swallows without any dangerous heart symptoms, is a perfect and permanent cure.

Now, many of our likes and dislikes are undoubtedly nervous. Tarantism, in the seventeenth century, so called from its supposed cause, the bite of a Tarantula spider, was a purely nervous epidemic. Only music could control its paroxysms; but during the attack they would hug and kiss and shed tears over a handkerchief of one color, while another color would make them furious. Do not too hastily blame the hermit and woman-hater; he has been jilted, received a nervous shock; is a nervous invalid. "A scalded dog fears cold water." Make the hermit take a good-sized bottle of Dr. Holmes's remedy. It

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is even a comforting cordial in confirmed bachelorhood and paralysis. But our aversion to spiders is not a nervous disorder; every one has it. I suppose it is entirely a matter of bad character, such as makes women mount a chair when a mouse is around. They are not exactly afraid of it; still, there is an element of danger about a mouse; they had rather be on a chair, out of its way. And the spider has a bad character as a fierce, untamable, dangerous beast; and this character, which is partly just, leads me to a slight dissertation on food and the conditions of its attainment. You know that a boy who kills flies always grows up cruel and hateful; and spiders catch and eat flies; that is their usual food. Charles Lamb asks in an essay, "Why the peculiar melancholy of tailors?" and gives as an answer, first, "their sedentary habits," and second, "something peculiar in their diet," which

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last he affirms to be cabbage. Statistics, however, do not bear him out in saying that tailors are specially addicted to cabbage, and it should not be asserted loosely. May we not, therefore, better put the occupation and the diet together, and say, too much goose? Nevertheless, his idea was right: food and the mode of its attainment have a great effect in making character. Savages, living as they do, are always fierce, cunning, deceitful, and objects of aversion and fear. And at the bottom of our social problems with our dangerous classes, the underlying question, what is it too often but this—How and what they eat and drink, and how they live?

Now the spider is just one of those predaceous savages. Our idle fellows, living from hand to mouth, always go armed, with the hand on the hip-pocket and ready to shoot. And see her. Posted at her tent door, she combs her hair, but, like a

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Bedouin Arab, with spear and weapons ready on the plain for war or plunder. Or she sinks down out of sight; but with four pairs of fierce eyes leveled at the web, and four pairs of "hands" fingering the tuneful strings, she hears through the hairs which cover the "hands." We may envy her the four pairs of eyes, all of which certainly cannot be mislaid or lost at the same time; but as to the "hands," how they would puzzle a tramp who has only two pockets to carry them in, and cannot make even one pair work! So she waits and watches. Dinner-time passes, and no fly; supper-time; breakfast-time; and by your own feelings, most respectable and easy-living friends, you may judge the irritation, the growing and vindictive ferocity, the prodigious hunger and voracity, of that spider before and when a fly does come. Just repeat that often enough, and see its effect on your character, you who

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grumble if breakfast is not ready at the minute, or the eggs are underdone. One thing, however, we cannot pardon in the spider: she is the very facsimile of a society flirt (let the Arachne Club take notice), cruel and a cannibal, deliberately outraging the tender susceptibilities of the male spiders, who are not so large and clever as she is. See her delicate little arts; how strikingly human! In her "most gorgeous gear," she is, say, at the Springs for the season. As Mr. S. approaches, she is at first coy, if she ventures to see him, retiring, then slyly inviting; so she plays her scenic rôle, spins a thread, and apparently catches her foot in it, until, addled, yet in doubt, the green youth ventures an approach. Indeed, as the poet says, "how might those killing eyes perplex," eight bright eyes, when two are often so damaging! But alas for him! The moment he passes a certain reserve her aspect

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changes. He has committed an indiscretion, knows it, trembles, and tries to escape. Full well he now understands "the venom of such looks"; and she—she springs upon and eats him up! Brutus cast his mantle over the dead body of Cæsar; but she, with deeper if momentary emotion, inters him in her own private mausoleum. In all this her action is so natural, so perfect, that the dramatic critic could not accuse her, as he does some actresses, of overacting or of excessive gesticulation or want of restraint; nor the male actor, especially in the last act of the play, of want of repose and finish. Then, however, the funeral rites (strictly private) over, she is on the lookout for another, repeats the scene without a single change of cast; from a unalist becomes a pluralist, the devourer of many livings, and goes home at the end of the season with jaded digestion, to recruit on a simpler home diet

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of flies done rare. The paragon of flirts! Sydney Smith says that "whenever so showy a woman as Mrs. T. appears at a place, though there is no garrison within twelve miles, the horizon is immediately clouded with majors." We doubt their pluck if they knew or suspected that Mrs. T. was flirting so sweetly with them merely as an appetite on legs and to supply a craving larder.

But from the spider let us pass to the flies—the web and its destined victims. Poor flies! what a time they have of it in life! Must it not seem to them, from their standpoint, as if the world were purposely one vast fly-trap, and they the unfortunates of creation—all its honey and its beautiful things, all its enjoyments, so dangerous? A perplexing world for a fly! If they venture into the air, the birds nip and eat them; if they light upon some inviting plant, it is only to find it a siren's

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shore; they touch the dog's-bane, and it catches them by the tips of their tongues. They escape Scylla only to fall upon Charybdis. The vegetable catch-fly seizes their legs and immerses them in its sticky fluid, or a Venus's fly-trap doubles up its leaves and pierces them with barbs. How can an inexperienced little fly navigate amid such treacherous seas? Look at this beautiful sundew, a cousin of the other Venus. Every leaf is covered with ruby points, every point tipped with a diamond—beauty equipped for the ball and conquest, and the destined victim a fly! Un-suspicious of trick or design, it is attracted and alights; but the diamonds are mock diamonds, paste, dissolve into threads, a winding-sheet; while the beautiful, tempting leaf immediately becomes his closed sepulcher—a victim of misplaced confidence and an honest nature. Surely no treacle could cure the smart of such per-

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fidy. But even that is not the worst. All roads may lead to Rome; but there is a choice, and none would prefer that by the Pontine Marshes. And do not the actions of flies sufficiently say, "Catch-fly, sundew, dog's-bane, pitcher-plant, spider—any way under heaven except tarred paper, which makes a fly mad with its undertow of stickiness, and then buries him, slowly and remorselessly, in a quicksand of unsavory slime!

We opine that, of these methods, the spider and her web are not the least pleasant and satisfactory for a fly. Dr. Storrs has said of Brooklyn forty years ago that it "was the last considerable place on the way to Greenwood." That was its standing and place among towns and villages. A few jolts through the streets, a straight road, and one was there, in the family receptacle. And as Brooklyn was, such is the spider and her web to the fly; the spider

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being, when it comes to the finish, his natural and family receptacle. As between them, however, we are not in sympathy with the fly, while admitting his useful place in nature. We say to him, "We object to see you butchered by bad boys — 'butchered to make a Roman holiday.' But when a naturalist can find six hundred species of you crowded into a district ten miles square, you are entirely too numerous—worse than the Italians. Moreover, you make yourself a nuisance worse than the most persistent organ-grinder. You have been known to buzz about and settle upon a minister's nose, when he could not defend himself. Nor can you quote Shakspeare's wit, as doing the same by Bardolph's rubicund frontispiece; the noses are never the same, as ministers' noses always lack what musical critics call brilliancy and color." Besides this, moreover, we take the common world view about honest and

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simple natures. This world is no place for such, at least in any quantity. They have no right to expect others to be honest; they should expect a snare in every bush. And we say to the fly, "Your troubles all come from your own freshness and stupidity. The proverb says that 'heaven and earth fight in vain against a dunce'; and you never know what to touch and what to let alone." Even in Wall Street, where tenderness and honesty grow in clusters on every curbstone, there is no sympathy for the flies; only envious admiration of the big cobs that engineer the corner and get away with the plunder.

And so we come to the cobweb as a snare and the representative of snares. Not for this, however, does the good and gentle housewife, who can tolerate deceitful cats and snappish pugs, immediately visit one with her besom of destruction. As for her Irish girl, she would not know

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a cobweb from a juniper-bush, since we are told that spiders were long ago driven from Ireland, with toads and vipers, by "the wholesome air"—a reason also, perhaps, for the large exodus of Irish men and girls; they do not like "the wholesome air." Nor yet is this the reason that spiders are troublesome. They live retired, each one in her solitary web, belong to no clubs, give no lunches, make no calls, exchange neither visits, gossip, nor news, in fact, cannot live together, except one inside the other. A naturalist once undertook a new industry of eight hundred large garden spiders, and paid them well and regularly in flies, equal to gold in their currency. Nevertheless, they immediately struck, and, like other striking unions, began eating one another up! Knowing each other's infirmities of temper, they therefore keep entirely apart, following Solomon's advice concerning a "brawling woman"—"to

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dwell in a corner of the housetop," under the eaves; to give her the whole house, if necessary; it is better; the noisiest spout must soon dry up, unless the gutter helps.

But a cobweb, even the outside, is unpleasantly suggestive, and, as every housekeeper feels, the house is no place for them. Goldsmith, who was himself a fly, tells us what trouble he had to save a pet one from his housekeeper's broom. She cared nothing for his "animated nature"; that was beyond her sphere of thought. Upon her devolved what Montgomery calls the "insect cares" of life, and she meant to have the house, including his study—O superfluous woman!—clean. It is only on old wine and to a connoisseur that dust and cobwebs are attractive. Yet, if not attractive, there is something plaintive about what the poet Young calls "the cobwebbed cottage" of the poor. They cover the walls, the ceiling, and are themselves cov-

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ered with many a day's accumulated dust and smoke. Do not blame the poor driven tenant, the housemaid of necessity and "all work." What can a poor body do, with no time to be neat, to brush cobwebs, even to look up, when there are the children to feed and the clothes to mend to keep them from "loop'd and window'd raggedness"; cobwebs and dust her only earthly hoard, except the children and the cares hoarded in her heart. It was poverty of a different kind that Hogarth suggested, but quite as effectively, when he draped the poor-box at a church door with a cobweb. The "good Samaritan," it said, had no pew there. The respectable "priest and Levite" were otherwise busy as they passed down the aisle "on the other side." Moreover, for the worshipers it was Sunday, an off day. To-day there is nothing doing, nothing to be done, there are no quotations, in a stock so rarely dealt in as char-

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ity; to-day is flunkeyism. To-morrow they will worship in reality. So suggests the cobweb on the unused poor-box down at the church door.

Still, it is usually snares for the feet of the unwary that cobwebs symbolize. And the remarkable thing is that in these there is really nothing new, substantially the same old shoe revamped to suit the occasion. And, in fact, the flies are the same, easily duped and swindled good, honest souls, even with "sawdust"—taken in a cobweb. Human nature and its passions are the same; therefore why change the trap? Gambling-houses in George III.'s time were just as perfect and just about the same in their appointments as now. To secure themselves against trouble they always included a lawyer or "attorney" to see them through the meshes of the law, and a "captain to fight any gentleman who," as the record says, "is peevish at

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losing his money." Perhaps syndicates, deals, and corners are not so open and flaring; but that is all. The big cobs are bigger and more adroit, if equally intent on sweeping in the flies. They do not have their intended dupes openly crowding the sidewalk and street, as they did in Exchange Alley during the "South Sea bubble" frenzy; where bishops and dissenters scrambled together, without regard to apostolic succession; doctors of opposite schools, without offense to the nostrils of either; lawyers and clients in a divorce suit, without a thought of it; and where even ladies of rank were pulled to pieces (as in the scene of the monkey's cage) without a word or a scowl! Indeed, one lady in Paris had her carriage upset and herself dumped at the door, that she might get in ahead of the crowd! The operators learned a lesson for their successors in villainy—to be more cautious. Their dead

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flies became for themselves a Spanish blister. Like the little creature called the synapta, which, when hard pressed by famine, sometimes eats up its body to save its head, so they, for the same purpose, had to disgorge their gains and property, and their audacious web proved "a twist of rotten silk." Still, however, the world is festooned with villainy and snares, despite all occasional house-cleanings; and the good dame, if now alive, who said of "total depravity" that it was "a good doctrine, if people would only live up to it," would be pleased and encouraged to know that, while not generally observed, it is well kept, especially by those who do not believe in it. And the good suffer with the bad. Honestly seeking legitimate gains of one kind and another, how many are yet obliged to say, in the language of the Italian epitaph, "I was well, I wished to be better, and I am here." Even in private life let the

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dear good flies of this world beware. The lightning-rod man is around, the tree-planter, the tramp, the beggar, and, worst of all, the omnivorous reporter. And here is Mr. Blank. You do not suspect him. He is no one in particular—"stat nominis umbra," like Junius, the shade of a name. But do not let him get you by the button-hole or into his corner, there to struggle, with glued feet, under the effect of his nippers and narcotic. The butcher-bird has been so called because it suspends its prey on thorns and devours it at leisure. So Mr. Blank: he keeps you on thorns, nettles, and even pins and needles, like a naturalist. Had you the two hundred and eighty stomachs and the six hundred hearts of the annelid, and superb patience, he would exhaust them and leave you limp and empty. Mr. Blank's name, or synonym, in natural history, is the pholas—with a natural genius as a rasp and stone-

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piercer. Predestined to bore, it lives to bore, and when it cannot bore it dies. In short, Mr. Blank is a human blunderbuss, a weapon noted for the size of its bore, and which of itself never goes off. One must have his wits about him in this world, and be himself, if possible, neither spider nor fly.

My subject has been about things in natural history in themselves small and seemingly insignificant—cobwebs. Yet what can be called insignificant ? A thread of cobweb across the disk of the telescope enables the astronomer to speak the stars in mid-ocean above and get the latest news. A cobweb made Bruce king of Scotland. A cobweb saved Mohammed and made the Eastern question of to-day. A few strange geologic flies in a piece of amber (the Greek electron) excited curiosity ; handling proved the amber (this electron) to be itself excitable, and this led on to electricity, the

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telegraph, telephone, with their accompanying suits and scandals. Aristophanes sharpened his wit on Socrates for measuring the leap of a flea. But Socrates was right, a true philosopher. It was indeed enough to interest a philosopher. This least of creatures, as he found, could, in proportion to size, outleap a man; it can draw seventy or eighty times its own weight. There have been some famous saltatory feats, and in our own time. One gentleman of acknowledged weight, with the simple help of a position and penholder, has jumped clean over the whole pile of civil-service rules without touching. A fat alderman known to fame has succeeded in jumping the heaviest bail and skipping to Canada—in fact, too far ever to get back. But, according to Goldsmith, “even the feats of Samson would not, to a community of fleas, appear at all miraculous.” A good reason, certainly, for enforcing the “dog

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law" against the whole community. I cannot think of a more striking expression to indicate sensational information than the common one, "Let me put a flea in your ear!" Of course, in Samson's place they would have gone differently to work; they would not have applied their strength to the stone pillars of the temple, but, with "the courage of their convictions," would nevertheless (who can doubt, it?) have proved to the Philistines that, if among the least in nature, they were by no means insignificant.



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